

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES ON
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

By

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful loving wife who has been by my side pushing me, supporting me and helping to bring out all that God has placed in me. My children who motivate me to be a person they can look up to and be proud of. My loving parents who instilled in me the belief that I can accomplish anything I set my mind toward and my grandparents who were amazing trailblazers that opened the doors of opportunities for countless others to walk through.

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“Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

– **Barack Obama**

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Abstract

Background: In 1966, a report was commissioned to determine the academic status of students across the United States (Dickenson, Winter 2016). The Coleman report determined that students of various ethnic and socio-economic groups had varied levels of academic proficiencies (Coleman, 1966). Ethnicity and Socio-economic status do not correlate to inherent decreased intellectual aptitude, which implies that additional constructs could contribute to lower academic performance. This research was designed to study the perceptions of teachers on the impact of improving academic performance through social and emotional learning support strategies. **Purpose:** This study was designed to examine teachers' perceptions of the impact of social and emotional learning support services on academic performance. **Research Question:** What is the perception of teachers of the impact of increased social and emotional learning support services in the form of peer group counseling and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance? **Methodology:** The focus of this qualitative case study assessed the perceptions of teachers by interviewing four teachers who were chosen because they were 8th-grade core content teachers who taught students that had received social and emotional learning support services throughout middle school. Each teacher was given semi-structured preset open-ended questions during their interviews. Follow up conversations occurred as a member check to clarify teacher perceptions, and the study was culminated with a panel interview that was recorded and transcribed. Data from the interviews were interpreted and coded to capture elements the participants described as the basis of their perceptions (Huddersfield, 2006; King, 1998). With each interview, the recoding of previously coded categories occurred to ensure accurate

perceptions from each participant (Altheide et al., 2008; Huddersfield, 2007; King, 1998). Following the summative group interview, the researcher looked for patterns, themes, plausibility, and clustering (Miles & Huberman, 1994), as well as potential relationships or common themes that existed between the teachers that were interviewed. **Findings:** The key findings that emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews and focus group responses were: (1) the teachers did not feel that they received thorough training on how to properly implement social and emotional strategies; (2) the teachers agreed that supporting the social and emotional development of students was important and should be consistently implemented schoolwide to achieve the maximum benefits; (3) the teachers perceived that having good relationships with their students had a positive impact on academic performance although to what degree varied; (4) the teachers did not have a strong perception that access to counseling services contributed to increasing academic achievement for students; and (5) only half of the teachers involved attributed a direct connection of student success with the SEL strategies. **Conclusion:** The teachers' perceptions varied regarding their support as to whether, social and emotional learning techniques increased academic growth. The perception of teachers in this study implied that for schools to have successful academic programs and meet the academic needs of students, they must also meet the social needs of students. Social and emotional learning promotes healthy student development and reduces problem behaviors among students, which results in improved classroom climate and overall academic improvement. With proper training and support, teachers can meet the social and emotional needs of students, which can contribute to increased academic achievement.

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Chapter I

Introduction to the topic

In the United States, we have a system of education that was theoretically designed to help prepare students to be successful in life. Today there are inconsistencies in schools and student success. In many areas throughout the United States, student's dropping out of school and failing to receive a high school diploma as a recognition of achieving a minimal skill set is a common occurrence. According to the National Center for Education Statistics in 2017, there were 2.1 million status dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24, and the overall status dropout rate was 5.4 percent. The status dropout rate varied by race/ethnicity in 2017. American Indian/Alaska Native youth had the highest status dropout rate (10.1 percent) of all racial/ethnic groups, including youth who were Hispanic (8.2 percent), Black (6.5 percent), of Two or more races (4.5 percent), White (4.3 percent), Pacific Islander (3.9 percent), and Asian (2.1 percent). Also, Hispanic and Black youth had higher status dropout rates than youth of Two or more races and White, Pacific Islanders, and Asian youth. In contrast, Asian youth had the lowest status dropout rate of all racial/ethnic groups except for Pacific Islander youth, whose status dropout rate was not measurably different from the rate for Asian youth (NCES 2017).

In previous decades people could support themselves in the manufacturing sector or with a trade that did not require a high school diploma or an advanced degree. Manufacturing jobs, however, peaked in 1979 at 19.4 million. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), by 1987, the number of manufacturing jobs had fallen to 17.6 million. Manufacturing payrolls bottomed out at fewer than 11.5 million in early 2010. From 2010 through 2017, more than 900,000 manufacturing jobs were added. The

overall employment in manufacturing is still at its lowest level since before the U.S. entered World War II (chart reference Table 1). With the decline in the manufacturing sector and the increase in the technology sector, receiving an education is tantamount for success.

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS), from May 2007 to May 2010, the U.S. economy lost nearly 7.4 million jobs in occupations that typically require a high school diploma or no formal educational credential for entry. In the nine years from May 2007 to May 2016, employment records showed that occupations that previously did not require formal educational credential for entry now required postsecondary education. Employment in occupations that typically require a high school diploma or the equivalent for entry remained nearly 1.3 million lower than in May 2007. This trend is projected to continue. From 2014 to 2024, occupations that typically require a high school diploma for entry are projected to grow more slowly than average, causing a further employment shift away from these occupations and toward occupations that typically require postsecondary education (BLS 2017) *¹.

May 2016 employment by entry education is shown in table 2. Nearly 28 percent of May 2016 employment was in occupations that typically require no formal educational credential for entry. This education category includes the two largest occupations: retail salespersons and cashiers. Other occupations that typically require no formal educational credential for entry include janitors, maids, and housekeeping cleaners, stock clerks and order fillers, personal care aides, landscaping workers, and most food preparation and serving related occupations (BLS 2017) *¹.

The idea of education as a 21st-century civil rights issue has surged (Petrides & Dezmon). For the Nation to advance and allow equal opportunities for all citizens, the education system must equip all students with minimal skills. According to the National Education Agency (NEA), this is not occurring. The term achievement gap refers to achievement patterns of students in high minority, and low-income areas are not consistently performing at similar levels to their counterparts in low minority or more affluent schools.

The National Center for Education Statistics in 2009 and 2011 showed that black and Hispanic students trailed their white peers by an average of more than 20 test-score points on the NAEP math and reading assessments at 4th grade and 8th grade, a difference of about two grade levels. These gaps persisted even though the score differentials between black and white students narrowed between 1992 and 2007 in 4th-grade math and reading and 8th-grade math (NCES, 2009, 2011).

While 82.7 percent of Asian students and 78.4 percent of white students in the class of 2008 graduated on time, that was the case for only 57.6 percent of Hispanic, 57 percent of black, and 53.9 percent of American Indian students. Likewise, only 68 percent of male students graduated on time in 2008, compared with 75 percent of female students. Over the long term, only about one-half of male students from minority backgrounds graduate on time (Education Week, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework revolves around restorative practices in education, and the perception of teachers on how meeting the social and emotional needs of students

affects their academic performance. Restorative practices (RP) are the overarching philosophy and actions that regard relationships and learning from harm as paramount in any community setting (Hulvershorn, 2018). The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) defines RP as including the use of “informal and formal processes and practices that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing” (Wachtel, 2016, p. 1).

RP encompasses a spectrum of actions from proactively building the community to responding in restorative ways when serious harm has occurred. Social-emotional learning (SEL) programming supports the goals of RP by providing a "coordinated and coherent approach to helping children recognize and manage their emotions, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish positive goals, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively" to enhance a student's connection to school (Payton et al., 2008).

Restorative practices reduce punitive behavior that would cause students to miss school by providing an alternative to the "punitive school disciplinary policies" that are ineffective and racially discriminatory (Anyon, 2015, p. iii). Restorative Practices enables schools to help students meet their social and emotional needs. As students' social and emotional needs are met, it has the potential to mitigate causes for lack of student success to include high rates of absenteeism, conduct misaligned with school expectation, and students performing below grade level among specific populations and potential solutions that will remedy these occurrences and support student success.

Personal Narrative

I was born in the Darnell Army hospital in Fort Hood, Texas. I was raised in a military family and traveled extensively, living in multiple States and on two Continents before receiving my High School diploma. Military towns are comprised of people from multiple States, Countries, Ethnicities, and Cultures. In this environment, you learn to value people and build relationships based upon who people are and their abilities instead of how they look or common perceptions.

My academic environment was varied. Although I was born in Texas, my first school was in a small rural farming community in Tennessee, where people lived an effortless lifestyle, and tobacco was the primary source of economic revenue. My mother was a teacher in this community, which is why I attended school there. This was one of the few experiences that I did not attend a school that was on a military installation or in an urban setting. When I was in school, the Department of Defense Schools were not aligned to a National Standard and Curriculum, which caused varying academic gaps from State to State.

As I was moving from one school to the next, I noticed in some of my classes some students had what we now classify as academic gaps due to State standards being inconsistent from one State to the next. When I was in school, I just knew that they were behind. At this stage in my life, I better understand why they were academically behind. I also realize how fortunate I was that my parents always took a copy of my school records and were extremely diligent in ensuring that I excelled. Other students were not as fortunate and, therefore, not as successful. Many military families at that time were reassigned duty stations every one to three years. For students whose parents were on

short term duties, assignments teachers may not have been able to diagnose gaps in their learning.

I was born in Texas, and most of my family resided in Texas, but apart from visits when my father was on leave, I was not raised in Texas. After receiving my undergraduate degree from Prairie View A&M University, I made my home in Houston, Texas, and began teaching in Houston I.S.D., which is the largest urban school district in the State. Houston I.S.D. has a large minority population, and most of the schools I served in conversely had large minority populations that were low socioeconomic status (SES) to middle-income areas.

As I began my teaching career, I noticed that many of my students were at varying academic levels, just like some of my friends in the Department of Defense schools. Although Texas has the same standards, some Schools, Districts, and Teachers taught at varying levels. Many students have migratory living patterns that do not give Teachers the time to diagnose and correct academic deficiencies. Other times students move from other States and/or other Countries that may have different standards. Just like some of my friends, some of my students had academic gaps based on external factors that impacted their education and academic performance.

Interacting with students from multiple geographic areas, ethnicities, and varying levels of financial support, I have found that students everywhere are more alike than they are dissimilar. Students have a desire to be successful, but people can have academic gaps due to external circumstances beyond their control. This led me to my research question about the topic of reducing academic gaps to help all students achieve success.

Problem Statement

For our Nation to advance and create a platform where everyone will have an opportunity for success, all students must be academically prepared. Whenever students are not prepared academically, they will be underprepared to be competitive in a global market to excel economically. A nation's utilization of its human potential is one of the determining factors in its prosperity (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010). According to a study by McKinsey and Company, a management consulting firm, showed if there had been a reduction in the academic achievement gap between African American and Latino students and their White peers, the Nation's gross domestic product (GDP) would have been between \$310 billion and \$525 billion higher in 2008 (McKinsey & Company, 2009). A study commissioned by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found relatively small improvements in students' academic performance can have significant impacts on the country's economy (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010).

The United States is at a crossroads. Our Nation will either rectify disparities in our education system that create academic achievement gaps and find a way to solve this disparity and prepare students for the highly skilled global workforce or allow the country to decline rapidly in the next few decades from its place at the top of the world's leading economies (Kahlenberg, 2012, 2013).

There are several predictors that can serve as a basis for identifying if a student is at risk of falling behind their counterparts academically. These include high absenteeism, low academic achievement, grade retention, and behavior problems (Farmer & Payne,

1992; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). By addressing the social needs of students Teachers can work to increase academic achievement and increase the performance of students during school or extended school hours to increase the probability of academic success and increase the potential of students successfully matriculating from Middle School to High School.

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of teachers of the impact of increased social and emotional learning support services in the form of peer group counseling utilizing restorative circles and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance. Do Teachers perceive that restorative practices are beneficial or a waste of academic time? Will restorative practices be able to increase academic performance, reduce rates of retention, and equip students with the skills and confidence to advance to High School. The location of the study will be in an urban Middle School (6-8) with a large low-income high minority student population.

The researcher chose this topic based upon the reaction of teachers to the implementation of restorative practices in the school. A change in Administration took place, and the new Principal was a strong proponent of restorative practices and implemented several to include; restorative circles beginning in grade 6 and this practice would be added to subsequent grades in subsequent years to give students a voice to express themselves and their feelings, counseling services that were accessible to all students and what is now being termed as wrap-around services to address non-academic needs of students.

Many teachers expressed discontent toward some aspects of the new policies. Some teachers stated amongst themselves that they would not institute circles for reasons such as; it was not in their job description; they were not counselors, or they did not think it was a good use of academic time. Others thought it was inappropriate to refer students to a licensed counselor expressing potential legal implications or labels that could be placed on students. Some voiced that schools should focus on educating students and were not the appropriate venue to focus on providing students and families with non-academic items such as food. Listening to the negative remarks, it brought about the thought of whether they could see how these activities could positively impact academic achievement.

Research question

What is the perception of teachers of the impact of increased social and emotional learning support services in the form of peer group counseling utilizing restorative circles and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance?

Summary

To prevent our Nation from becoming losing our current economic status and ensure financial security for future generations, we must prepare all students to be academically proficient so they can compete on a global scale. If the next generation of citizens of the United States of America are not able to contribute to our society and economy, the results will be a loss of GDP and a decline of prominence and influence. To ensure that our Nation remains competitive, we must ensure that all students are able to access the tools needed to increase their academic growth. Academic achievement

gaps and deficiencies are systemic issues that need to be resolved for our Nation to advance and operate at optimal efficiency, which benefits everyone. The ability of our Nation to remain a leading Nation hinges upon the ability to educate and equip all students. One set of tools is restorative practices to include social and emotional learning to reduce academic achievement gaps and deficits that may exist and increase academic proficiency.

Terms

Academic achievement gap - refers to the observed, persistent disparity of educational measures (e.g., standardized test, reading proficiency, graduation rates) between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status (SES), race, and ethnicity (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2010).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) – “Potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being. These experiences range from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to parental divorce or the incarceration of a parent or guardian” (Sacks, Murphy, & Moore, 2014, p. 1).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) - is the reauthorization (by Congress) of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title I, the United States government aid program for disadvantaged students in which the goal is to provide a quality of education for all children closing the academic achievement gap that exists between students living in poverty, students of color, and other students (Taylor, 2006; Thomas & Brady, 2005).

Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) - is a socially constructed measure of an individual's or family's societal hierarchical standing based on combination of variables: economics, education, income, and wealth, place of residence, and occupation earning potential (Walpole, 2003).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – “a mental health condition, characterized by intrusive re-experiencing, pervasive avoidance, and hyper-arousal symptoms, which some individuals develop as a result of experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening traumatic event” (Van der Kolk, 2000, p. 8).

Social and emotional (SEL) – is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)

Restorative Practices (RP) – are based on restorative justice principles instead of punishment. They aim first to build classroom communities that are supported by clear agreements, authentic communication, and specific tools to bring issues and conflicts forward in a helpful way. They provide specific pathways to repair harms by bringing together those who are affected by misbehavior in a dialogue to address concerns, achieve understanding and come to agreement about setting things right (Clifford, 2015, p. 10).

Restorative Circles (RC) - are strategies you can use in your classrooms to develop relationships, build communities, and respond to conflicts and problems that arise. With restorative circles, you give everyone an equal opportunity to speak and be listened to (Costello, 2010, p.12).

Wrap-around services (WAS) - support critical issues of students: mental and physical health needs, food insecurity, stable housing, violence, parent incarceration, and things that adversely affect college and career readiness or their ability to learn (Houston ISD).

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Today student's dropping out of school is a common occurrence. Dropout prevention is a critical priority in the United States (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). In an age where people could support themselves with a trade that provided onsite training a high school diploma or an advanced degree was not crucial, however with the decline of high paying low skilled jobs in the manufacturing sector and the increase in the technology sector receiving an education is tantamount for success. During the past decade, the idea of education as a 21st-century civil rights issue has surged (Petrides & Dezmon).

For the Nation to advance and allow equal opportunities for all citizens, the education system must equip all students with minimal skills. Data shows this is not occurring. The achievement patterns of students in high minority and low-income areas are not consistently performing at similar levels to their counterparts. This difference in academic readiness is one indicator that students will drop out of school without attaining a high school diploma (Rumberger, R.W. 2011). A student's decision to drop out of school is often complex and compromised of multiple domains to include, but not limited to, financial, individual, family, and social issues (Porce, Fortuna, Lin, & Alegria, 2011; Rumberger, 2011).

Multiple influences contribute to academic success or failure. In 1992, Felitti and Anda developed the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) that focused on categories

of childhood maltreatment, neglect, and dysfunctional family environment (PESI Healthcare 2016). Brunzell et al. (2015) state that damage to an individual from the consequences of trauma inflicted on a child during the adolescent years can negatively impact students and hinder their academic success and have long-lasting adverse outcomes during adulthood. "The significance of the ACE study as it relates to schools is that children who are exposed to multiple ACES are overloaded with stress hormones, which leaves them in a constant state of survival" (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 14) which prevents them from focusing on academics or other areas of focus.

Schools must work to develop systems that will help students become academically proficient in order to aide in their future potential to become financially adept adult that will be able to contribute to society. Restorative practices such as Social and Emotional Learning strategies equip students with tools that can guide them on their journey to success. Although school has not traditionally been a student's first experience with learning social-emotional skills, school is a place where students are faced daily with social interactions. How well students learn to interact, navigate potentially harmful interactions, and process, multiple other stimuli will, in part, determine their level of potential academic and financial success. Students must know how to practice behavioral norms in their academic setting.

Counseling has been a well-established routine to help people cope with and overcome traumatic experiences in their lives. In 1942 a counselor named Rogers established the person-centered approach (PCA), which stated that there is an internal driving force that is an actualizing tendency present in all individuals, and psychological distress occurs when there is incongruence between an individual's actual experiences

and their self-concept (Rogers 1951). Once individuals can balance experiences with their self-concept or worth, they will be empowered to overcome traumatic occurrences in their lives successfully. Currently, there is a growing body of evidence that supports that counseling services for students have a positive effect on academic performance (Ogden 2006, Sink 2005, Sink et al. 2008).

The Academic Achievement Gap

Overview

For decades people in the United States have been concerned about the achievement gap that exists and is currently widening between race and socio-economic class (Haycock). This section of the literature review will focus on research that will highlight the achievement gaps between various racial, socio-economic groups, and subject areas. Review long term variations in trends in this phenomenon and potential reasons that support these trends. Showcase progressive changes featuring schools that do not reflect current trends and highlighting successful efforts that brought about change. Last, we will analyze and synthesize possible solutions that could be successful change agents.

Racial inequality in educational performance has been a persistent issue in the United States (Plaut, 1955; Coleman, 1968; Portes & Wilson, 1976; Kober, Chudowsky, Chudowsky & Dietz, 2010). Before the United States desegregation of public schools in the 1960s, various ethnic groups took responsibility for ensuring students in their communities were successful; however, there was an academic achievement gap because every school did not have equal access to materials and resources. After desegregation,

there was a significant push to lessen this gap resulting in a drastic decrease between 1970 and 1988. The achievement gap between African American and white students was cut in half, and the gap separating Latinos and whites declined by one-third, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

The question then arises as to what caused the decrease in achievement within the African American and Latino student community. According to Haycock et al., to increase the achievement levels of minority and low-income students, we need to focus on what matters: high standards, a challenging curriculum, good teachers, and providing students with social and mental support that will help ensure academic success.

Historical background

Slavery was the first major contributing factor to the Black-White literacy gap (Anderson, 1988). Most Slaves performed unskilled tasks that were labor intensive. A minority of Slaves obtained vocational skills. The racial academic achievement gap was first documented by The National Center for Education Research estimated in 1870 that the literacy rate for European Americans was approximately 80%, whereas a mere 20% of former slaves were literate (Snyder, 1993) after the end of the Civil War. After the Civil War, a system of schools was instituted by former slaves, churches, and others that were designed to educate children of former slaves initially with little government support (Anderson, 1988).

In the late 19th and 20th Centuries, schools for minorities were officially established with a State-supported curriculum to educate minorities and create and support an economic-based caste system (Jones, 1917 & Anderson, 1988). The course

offerings included sewing, homemaking, and laundry for the girls, and manual arts, bricklaying, carpentry, and auto mechanics for the boys (Byrd, 1930).

Through legal action, the separate but unequal system of education in the United States was overturned by the decision of *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, which stated that segregated schools violated the 14th Amendment (Warren, 1954). Jonathan Kozol documented that although schools obtained the classification of being legally desegregated, many urban school districts were still segregated and many African American students in inner-city public schools endured deplorable inequalities including racial discrimination, physical abuse, low expectations, and gross overcrowding in unsafe school buildings (Kozol, 1967). The historical exclusion of African Americans from high-quality public education has had a devastating impact on the school performance of African American students and is a primary underlying factor contributing to the achievement gap that still prevails.

As stated in chapter one: education is a human right that is imperative to success to all people. That education must meet the needs of the population-based upon their goals and reflect the people that it is designed to educate. The following excerpt from *At the Essence of Learning* by Geneva Gay (1994) crystallizes this idea:

Education in the United States is a public creation, a public mandate, a public service. Undeniably, the "American Public" is becoming increasingly pluralistic. To serve its constituency adequately, the system of education must likewise be culturally pluralistic. In symbol and substance, it should convey to all students that they and their heritages are essential components of what constitutes the essence of society's cultures, values, and ideals. That is, individuals from all social classes, and ethnic, racial, gender, language, and cultural groups have the right to be validated, to have unrestricted access to the full range of opportunities available to citizens, and to have a representative voice in decisions that affect their lives and

destinies. The ethics and actions these values engender are necessary conditions for the support and survival of a democratic society. (p. 98)

Solutions

A rigorous curriculum aligned to standards is essential for students to develop higher levels of cognitive skills that will contribute to success in college. In mathematics, students who complete the full college preparatory sequence perform higher on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than those who complete only one or two courses. Students who take vocational education courses tend to have lower scores on National assessments. Nearly three-quarters of high school graduates advance to higher education with around fifty percent completing two years of the curriculum. The quality and intensity of high school coursework are the most critical determinants of success in college. To better promote academic growth, students must be supplied with appropriate standards-aligned curricula. Access to curricula, textbooks, and other instructional and self-directed learning materials will help drive rigorous academics (Petrides and Dezmon).

The question that may arise is academic success commensurate with ethnicity or socio-economic groupings, which could be validated by many schools with high minority and low-income schools were all underperforming. Karin Chenoweth has documented that academic achievement does not correlate to ethnicity of economic status.

The existence of high-performing schools where low-income students and students of color do as well as their middle-class peers raises pivotal questions: Why don't all schools succeed, and how did these schools turn challenges into triumphs? The key to the success of the schools highlighted in the research by Chenowith had several

similar components. Each school developed complex approaches to the complicated task of educating all students. They also shared the deeply rooted belief that all their students can and will learn, and it is up to the adults to figure out how to ensure that happens (Chenoweth).

Psycho-Social based support components that promoted students feeling included in the school-based community and equipping students to navigate social stress and trauma were linked to solutions that reducing and helped students overcome academic achievement gaps. School-based mentoring and counseling components which will be discussed in more detail in the literature review.

Understanding Culture

Researcher has found that culture, family life experiences, and home conditions are among the cultural factors that contribute to academic achievement (Barton, 2003). Ogbu's (1974) theory states African Americans differ significantly from other minorities and Whites in their perception of a) the trustworthiness of the dominant culture and the educational system to provide quality education; b) the effectiveness of education in contributing to their realization of upward mobility; and c) how education impacts their cultural identity. It is difficult for a culture or group of people to support a system that they have not experienced a high degree of success with or in.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

It is critical to study scholars such as Chris Emdin and Paulo Freire that share pedagogy that expands our views on education. Researches have confirmed that the achievement gap will continue to expand if educators continue with current trends. The research by Chenoweth highlights that many high-minority low-income schools are achieving high levels of success in various areas, which gives supporting evidence that success is possible. Through intensive efforts, culturally responsive teaching, seeking multiple methodologies, establishing high goals, establishing counseling interventions, and supporting teachers as they support students in their academic pursuits. Research shows that educators can support the battle in reducing the achievement gap.

Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010a, p. 31). Ladson-Billings says that for teachers to be effective, they must first understand the students they are teaching, the environment the students come from, and what strengths the children bring with them to the academic environment for educators to build on. Just because a child may not come ready based upon certain cultural constructs, children come with strengths to be built upon (Ladson-Billings 1990, 1992). Geneva Gay encapsulates this principle when she writes "I argue that the education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should connect in-school learning to out-of-school living; promote educational equity and excellence; create community among individuals from different cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds; and develop students' agency, efficacy, and empowerment” (Gay, 2010b).

Counseling Interventions

Just as important as it is for teachers to know their student body and be able to be culturally relevant, school counselors need to as well. With the current student population in the United States becoming increasingly diverse, ideas and thoughts surrounding cultural issues, multicultural competency, and culturally responsive counseling services have been among the most challenging topics facing school counselors and personnel (Lee, 2001; Porto, 2010). In order to ensure the effectiveness of school counseling services, school counselors must work together with key stakeholders within the school and community to create comprehensive action plans for developing culturally responsive counseling opportunities for students.

Through proactive program development that includes access, equity, and culturally responsive school counseling practices, school counselors can help remove barriers so all students can achieve academic success as much as possible (McMahon et al., 2009). By understanding a student's daily life both inside and outside of school, school counselors can ensure the delivery of culturally responsive practices (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011).

Potential Societal consequences

The adverse effect of the gap in academic performance between African American and White students has life-long consequences for African Americans. These consequences include limited higher education and employment opportunities, lower earnings, higher incarceration rates, and less political influence than their White counterparts (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Lochner, & Moretti, 2003; Paige & Witty, 2010). The persistent underperformance of African American students and other Minority

groups hurt the African American and Minority communities, but it adversely affects the overall American society (McKinsey & Company, 2009).

The achievement gap is an indicator of reduced potential job prospects, lower income earning potential, poor health, and increased likelihood of incarceration (DeBaun & Roc, 2013; Paige & Witty, 2010). Therefore, the chronic underachievement of African American and Minority school children has far-reaching implications for their future ability to succeed as adults and to ultimately become contributing members of society. Their poor performance in school minimizes not only their post-secondary educational opportunities and career potential but also their capacity to earn substantial wages and live in safe communities with high-performing schools for their children, which would continue the cycle of underachievement (Aud, 2010).

A nation's utilization of its human potential is one of the determining factors in its prosperity (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010). Indeed, the academic achievement gap in the United States drastically reduces the utility of its human potential (McKinsey & Company, 2009). Specifically, the results of studies conducted by McKinsey and Company, a management consulting firm, showed if there had been a reduction in the academic achievement gap between African American and Latino students and their White peers, the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) would have been between \$310 billion and \$525 billion higher in 2008.

Summary

An academic achievement gap exists between majority and minority students that have existed historically. Multiple factors have contributed to this gap, and measures must be taken to reduce it, or our Nation is going to continue to be separated with a system of haves and have nots, which will ultimately deprive our Nation of additional economic gains that will cripple our long-term economy. Culturally awareness and relevant pedagogy from educators will enhance our academic system, decrease the academic achievement gap for all students, and support our Nation to advance to higher levels of economic advancement.

Restorative Practices (RP)

Background

During the 1980s and 1990s, school administrators' concerns about school violence led to an increase in the implementation of zero-tolerance policies (Curtis, 2013; Skiba, 2014). According to Monahan et al. (2014, p. 1110), zero-tolerance policies were a broad category of rules that generally reflected rigid, mandated-response approaches to school discipline." According to the American Psychological Association, these policies were often blindly applied regardless of the gravity of the behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context" (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 852). One of the most common criticisms of zero-tolerance policies was that there was a high degree of racial disparity in-school suspension and expulsion in US schools with the implementation of zero-tolerance policies (Skiba et al., 2002).

According to Thompson (2016), research showed zero-tolerance policies had not only ineffective outcomes but also had negative impacts on social and academic outcomes, particularly for students from historically disadvantaged groups in education – students of color, students classified as low-income, and children with disabilities. Another criticism of zero-tolerance policies in schools focused on the increased security and police presence on school campuses. While Skiba (2014) suggests that zero-tolerance advocates believe that the failure to suspend or expel students allows "the cycle of disruption and violence to gain a solid toehold in our schools and community" (p. 28), there is a lack of evidence to show that school suspensions prevent future misbehavior or make schools safer (Gregory, Clawson, Davis and Gerewitz, 2016) or that suspensions and expulsions reduce school disruptions or improve the school climate (Skiba,2014).

Analyzing the harmful effects of zero-tolerance policies, Skiba and Peterson (2000) posited “a new perspective on school discipline” (p. 340) and described the emergence of a comprehensive model of prevention to address “the complexity of emotional and behavioral problems in schools” (p. 341). Restorative practices were rooted in restorative justice, which is "a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offense come together to collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future" (Braithwaite, 1999, p. 5). Restorative practices provide an alternative to the "punitive school disciplinary policies" that are ineffective and racially discriminatory (Anyon, 2015, p. iii).

Overview

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) defines restorative practices as including the use of “informal and formal processes and practices that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing” (Wachtel, 2016, p. 1). Restorative practices encompass a spectrum of actions from proactively building community to responding in restorative ways when serious harm has occurred. Social-emotional learning (SEL) programming supports the goals of restorative practices by providing a “coordinated and coherent approach to helping children recognize and manage their emotions, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish positive goals, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively” to enhance a student’s connection to school (Payton et al., 2008).

Oliver (2016) described restorative practices as a framework for addressing student discipline and behavior issues through a lens where relationships are the focal point when working with students. Restorative practices provide an opportunity for someone to repair the harm they may have done to someone else, and the intention in doing so is that the offending student will realize the impact his or her choices have on others and be encouraged to engage in positive behavior choices in the future.

According to Pavelka (2013), there are three core principles of restorative justice as they were initially developed to address crime and wrongful occurrences. Each of these principles will be aligned with school-related actions. The first principle deals with repairing the harm caused by adverse behaviors. In the case of schools and classrooms, this is typically related to behavior and offenses that may have been taken by staff members or peers. This process shows the offending person how to mend and restore the

relationship. The second principle involves reducing the risk of future similar infractions, which will help students establish other processes or procedures that may be more appropriate. In a situation where a student may use verbally offensive language, they must be taught how to appropriately express themselves in a manner that is more conducive with general societal norms. The third principle incorporates the community as a whole and encourages all involved stakeholders to take a portion of responsibility by addressing the impact and being proactive in the reparation.

Principles of Restorative Justice in Schools

Sellman, Cremin, and McCluskey (2014) indicated that there is no real unanimity regarding a definition of what restorative justice implementation looks like in school. In a school setting, this can be accomplished by having schoolwide norms that are communicated and upheld by all stakeholders as well as involving broader community members that support the student outside of the school setting. By implementing restorative justice practices, each student can take responsibility for their actions and to contribute to a positive school climate, creates a stronger academic environment and equips students to handle future potential conflicts better.

In the Table 3 below, the seven principles that guide restorative justice practices in education are illustrated.

Table 3*Seven Principles That Guide Restorative Justice Practices in Education*

Principle	Explanation
1	Meeting student needs
2	Providing accountability and support for students
3	Making things right
4	Viewing conflict as a learning opportunity
5	Building healthy learning communities
6	Restoring relationships
7	Addressing power imbalances

Note. Adapted from “Restorative Justice in Education: What We Know So Far,” by K. Evans, J. Lester, & V. A. Anfara, Jr., 2013, *Middle School Journal*, 44(5), 57–63.

The first principle that guides restorative practices in a school setting focuses on meeting student needs. In many instances, the unmet social and emotional needs of students result in conflict, violence, or students acting out at school or in class. The goal of restorative practices, according to Vaandering (2010), is to meet those needs through establishing relationships instead of giving students a consequence for their behavior. The second principle that guides restorative practices in education is to provide accountability and support for students who are not routinely meeting or complying with acceptable norms. Evans et al. (2013) explained that there is an emphasis on individuals taking responsibility for harm committed to others. By building a sense of community between stakeholders, it supports students in acknowledging inappropriate actions and accepting responsibility for their actions (Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006).

Principles 3 and 4 involve making things right and viewing conflict as a learning opportunity (Evans et al., 2013). These principles involve repairing relationships by teaching empathy so that students can view situations from other peoples' perspectives. This process does not negate how one party may feel regarding the conflict or situation but focuses on how it may be perceived by others. Fields (2003) explained that when students are working together to repair a disagreement or infraction, they also are developing an awareness and understanding of the other person's feelings and perspective. Conclusively resolving conflict also prevents further escalations of situations at future dates.

Principles 5 (building healthy learning communities), 6 (restoring relationships), and 7 (addressing power imbalances) are interconnected and will be addressed as such. These combined principles create a stronger bond and learning community among stakeholders that contribute to a more positive environment allowing students to be able to learn and communicate their needs to others. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) explained that the value comes from both students responding to the inappropriate behavior through communication about what transpired, the needs of all who were impacted, and collaborative ways to address the damage that was caused.

Multiple variations exist on how to tailor restorative practices to various campus environments. Standard restorative justice practices include peer mediation, classroom circles where students resolve problems through sharing thoughts and ideas, and restorative conferencing, students write apology letters for rude or off-task behavior and going before a "peer/teen court" or group of peer mediators to explain their actions and dialogue about the effects of their actions and any lessons learned from the aftermath and

depending on the design consequences can be administered by the court as part of the restorative process (Pavelka, 2013).

Implementation of Restorative Justice in schools

A case study series published by the Dignity in Schools Organization (2013) outlined five key elements that support the effective implementation of school-wide restorative practices for schools (see Table below).

Table 4

Five Key Elements That Support Effective Implementation of School-Wide Restorative Practices

Key elements of implementation	Explanation
1. A full-time position of restorative coordinator (per school site)	This coordinator position's sole focus is supporting a positive, restorative approach to discipline at the school. This coordinator position oversees implementation of the other four key elements described in the table.
2. A school-wide strategic plan	The coordinator facilitates participation of all school stakeholders in dialogue and decision-making involving pre-existing behavior-related strategies (e.g., conflict resolution, peer mediation, peer mentoring) and moving them into a restorative framework and set of values. They also ensure that this new restorative framework is integrated into all parts of the school site.
3. Ongoing training for all stakeholders	All faculty and staff members and a select group of students and parent leaders should receive restorative practices training so they can become familiar with the restorative practices and train their peers.
4. Youth and parent leadership	A group of students and parent leaders who plan and assist with implementation of restorative practices at the school site, such as forming a student leadership council or engaging students and parents to be a part of trainings for school staff.
5. Systematic collection and monitoring of data	A common set of indicators specific to each school site should be developed, along with protocols for collecting data to guide and measure implementation and results of restorative practices.

Note. Adapted from "Building Safe, Supportive and Restorative School Communities in New York City: Case Study Series (Vol. 2)," by Dignity in Schools Organization, 2013 (https://www.nesri.org/sites/default/files/DSC-NY_CaseStudy_2013.pdf).

The model outlines vital elements of the implementation of school-wide procedures for restorative practices. An ideal scenario would have restorative coordinator to lead and support the implementation efforts (Dignity in Schools

Organization, 2013). The coordinator would be responsible for working with staff members, students, and parent leaders to establish a school-wide plan and incorporate any current strategies related to behavior and develop an approach to make those practices restorative in nature as to build upon systems that are progressive and in use. Ongoing training and support would also be an essential element for implementation with constant feedback and monitoring from a group of representative stakeholders designed to assist with the implementation of restorative practices at the school site. Last, the final element related to implementation involves establishing a systematic way for the school to collect and monitor data that measures the effectiveness of the results of the restorative practices so adjustments can be made to maximize the benefits.

The main idea behind the implementation of restorative practices is to help students' develop into problem-solvers as they understand that they did something wrong, while at the same time helping them make the connection to how their actions impacted someone else or a group of people (Meichenbaum, 2014). When restorative justice practices are implemented in schools, the classroom teacher's role is integral to success, and therefore it is crucial that classroom teachers understand and support the process. In many instances, this can be accomplished by helping them see and understand the intended results. According to Westervelt (2014), some teachers become frustrated when a student does not receive the right type of consequence for some infraction. Without teacher support and training regarding restorative justice practices, the effectiveness of implementation will be limited.

Teacher-Student relationships

The value of Teacher-Student relationships has been debated in academic circles. Through relationships, people learn about the world and find support and companionship (Sameroff, 2010). Interpersonal relationships in schools are integral for motivation, engagement, and, ultimately, academic achievement. Research supports that the more culturally responsive a Teacher is toward students' it can support a more favorable climate and classroom environment, which has a direct impact on student academic growth. Hattie's (2012) meta-analysis of student-teacher relationships reported an effect size of 0.72 across 229 studies involving over 350,000 students worldwide. Given that Hattie's reported effect size for a year's worth of academic growth in school is 0.40, the possible impact on student learning nearly doubles the speed of these gains. Culturally responsive approaches to relationship and pedagogy contribute to environment and academic growth.

Relationships are often built around affiliation and perceived similarities between one another. Therefore, when people perceive themselves as commonalities with others, greater liking and closer relationships typically result (Gehlbach et al., 2016). According to Gehlbach et al., when people perceive more significant similarity with their counterparts and, notably, when teachers received feedback about their similarities with specific students, they perceived to have better relationships with them, and those students had higher classroom grades. The results of this specific case study indicated that the academic achievement gap at this school was decreased by over 60%. The increased student-teacher relationships had a direct impact on academic performance. Students perform better when they have a positive relationship with their teacher.

Day-Vines and Terriquez (2008) contained elements of both culturally responsive teaching or sensitivity and restorative justice. The study was developed in response to the high suspension and expulsion rates of African American and Latino male students at a racially diverse, urban high school in California. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of teachers of the impact of increased social and emotional learning support services in the form of peer group counseling utilizing restorative circles and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance. A group of students formed a group entitled “Youth Together.” The group, composed of students from diverse backgrounds, met and shared stories of unfair disciplinary practices that were occurring in classrooms. Students initiated meetings with school administrators, teachers, counselors, parent organizations, and other student groups to discuss the problem they saw with many referrals from teachers written for infractions labeled as defiance of authority, which were disproportionately given to African American and Latino boys. Day-Vines and Terriquez found that “student-teacher relationships that exuded warmth, nurturing, caring, respect, and open communication” (p. 171) resulted in improved behavioral outcomes. Day-Vines and Terriquez (2008) went on to note that “[students] reported trusting the teacher’s authority more when the teacher exhibited caring attitudes and maintained high academic expectations” (p. 171).

As staff members became more aware of the data and policies focused on cultural awareness, sensitivity, and relationship building, the campus was able to institute change. As a result of the relationships fostered through this collaborative and problem-solving process, office discipline referrals decreased by 75%. Recommendations emanating from the study included interventions that promote “developmental assets such as personal

accountability, leadership, resiliency, self-management, personal empowerment, social competence, while simultaneously cultivating students' ability to work effectively with adults and other authority figures" (p. 171). The study found that even though students did not use the term SEL, they recognized the need for it and responded positively to what are generally considered SEL strategies when teachers displayed more caring behaviors.

Most common Restorative practices used in schools

Restorative practices have definitive ideologies in common as the base of all interventions, which include the following (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005):

- An approach which focuses on relationships before rules
- Gives voice to the person who has been harmed
- Gives voice to the person who caused the harm
- Engages in collaborative problem-solving strategies
- Improves student responsibility
- Empowers change and growth
- Includes plans for restoration and reparation

The three main restorative activities used most frequently in schools designed to accomplish these tenants are circles, conferences, and mediation (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). Each approach embodies the values of restorative discipline and addresses questions around the choice, the results of the actions, and what can be utilized to mitigate the possible negative results and bring restoration back to the relationship. This is accomplished by establishing root causes and who the stakeholders are in the situation;

discussions also surround what was learned and what different choices may be made in the future.

The three activities listed above have elements of multiple processes that can range from informal on the spot mediation to formal group methods, which include five fundamental processes: affective statements, affective questions, small impromptu conferences, and formal conferences (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009; Zehr, 2015). Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) studied restorative practices in schools and determined that there was not one single component or specific combination of components that were more effective than another, thus determining that the selection and combination of elements was not a determining factor in the results.

Affective Statements

These are also referred to as restorative statements or “I statements.” Affective statements are designed to address the behaviors of students, whether good or unacceptable. Mirsky (2011) states that their purpose is to help students become aware of how their actions affect others. These interactions can quick and close to when the action or event occurs, informal and spontaneous, which allows them school personnel to address issues immediately, allowing students to begin to learn how their actions make adults feel without the act of shaming or blaming. The purpose of using affective statements is for students to become cognizant of how their actions affect others.

Affective Questions

These are also referred to as “Restorative Questions,” affective questions are questions that are posed to give students the opportunity to reflect on their misbehavior or

behavioral concerns by allowing the student to think and process for themselves. The questions are formed such that the student is required to reflect on how their behavior affected other people and have become standardized over time (Costello et al., 2009).

Some examples are:

- “What happened?”
- “What were you thinking at the time?”
- “What have you thought about since?”
- “Who has been affected by what you did?”
- “In what way?”
- “What do you think you need to do to make things right?”

These questions are designed to create dialogue, giving students a voice, and allowing students to create an open dialogue and talk about the incident as they reflect on how it happened and who was affected by it, as opposed to just asking students “why.” These questions equip students to express themselves better and build and repair relationships.

Small Impromptu Conferences

Small impromptu conferences are spontaneous based upon a situation. They are based on affective questions and are designed to resolve lower-level incidents involving more than two people swiftly. Mirsky (2013) describes these as a single meeting attended by those affected by an incident or conflict. Each person in attendance describes the incident and what occurred from their point of view and reflect on how they were affected by the situation. The focus of the conference is to repair the harm, including

describing to the person what he or she must do to make the wrong right. It is important to note this does not apply in cases of consistent acts of bullying.

Formal Conferences

Also called restorative conferences are another process that can be used. These conferences are reserved for severe incidents and must be facilitated by a trained facilitator, require organization, planning, and coordination. The participants should be limited to the one who was in the wrong, anyone affected by the wrongdoing, and the family and friends of both parties (Costello et al., 2009; Mirsky, 2011). The intention is for the wrongdoer to establish what should be done to right the wrong with the one who was hurt, as well as with family and friends who may have been indirectly affected. Follow-up monitoring by the facilitator must occur for accountability purposes (Mirsky, 2013).

Circles

Circles function as planned whole or small group conversations, which should be facilitated by a teacher or staff member. Circles, or trust circles as they are sometimes referred to, can occur daily, weekly, or formed to address misbehavior or issues that arise in a classroom. Trust circles can also be used to build community within a classroom setting by involving everyone and encouraging all students to participate by expressing their feelings, listening to everyone else in the circle, and taking responsibility for their actions.

According to T. Wachtel (2013), circles have multiple purposes, which include: conflict resolution, healing, support, decision making, information exchange, and

relationship development. Each of the following circles is named based upon the design of the circle. Proactive circles are scheduled as part of the regular program to develop relationships and build community. These programs can simultaneously address current incidents, conflicts, or problems in the classroom (T. Wachtel, 2013). Responsive circles respond directly to a conflict that has occurred with the intention of “repairing harm and restore relationships after an incident or pattern of behavior” (J. Wachtel, 2014, p. 4). This type of circle is less formal than a restorative conference, does not take as much preparation, and does not follow the use of scripted questions.

Trust circles should follow a general structure where the facilitator provides the purpose for the circle. The teacher introduces a talking piece, which is a defined, small object that is easily held and passed from one person to the next person. The facilitator reviews the guidelines and norms of the circle. A standard norm should always include that only the person with the talking piece, can speak while everyone else listens actively. A second norm should be that everyone must speak when given the talking piece even if they just say “pass.” The facilitator keeps the conversation moving with affective questions and leading the group to summarize their discussion and determine actions to be taken. Students are given a last opportunity to comment, and then the facilitator closes the circle (J. Wachtel, 2014). The trust circles are designed to allow students to share openly in a safe environment that will create solutions and affect outcomes.

"The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility, we can labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively

imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom." (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 1994, 207)

Just as circles work to build community, educators must work to make cultural connections with and accept students for who they are as they come. Restorative justice approaches to schooling advance the opportunity to frame new instructional methodologies that allow educators to transgress the limitations of racially and culturally unjust schooling that has not affirmed all children's identities as intelligent human beings of esteem and value (Archibold, 2016). Culturally responsive restorative justice practices focus sharply on the critical reality that to be in relationship with students in classrooms and schools requires that educators become curious about, value, and respect the cultural, social, and experiential differences among themselves and their students. Archibold goes on to support the argument that Educators who choose to implement culturally responsive restorative approaches make their classrooms environments sites for learning how to learn in the context of difference, utilize conflict as an opportunity for learning, and be in more affirming, collaborative and responsive relationships among each other. Culturally responsive restorative justice practices provide a foundation for constructive, deep, and transformative learning for the teacher and all students. Just as educators need to create a culturally responsive and affirming classroom setting, restorative circles should support this, which will benefit the classroom climate and support academic achievement.

Summary

Restorative practices was developed as a positive alternative to zero-tolerance policies used by many schools starting in the 1990s. Restorative practices stemmed from research rooted in restorative justice, which was designed to give people a voice in

occurrences related to the criminal justice system that was effective in resolving conflict and restoring relationships allowing all parties the opportunity to connect and move forward. Restorative practices focus on helping students and stakeholders to establish and maintain positive relationships. The main idea behind restorative practices involves students developing into problem-solvers as they understand that they did something wrong, while at the same time helping them make the connection to how their actions impacted someone else or a group of people (Meichenbaum, 2014). Focusing on the social and emotional needs of students instead of punishment meets students' needs while promoting a positive climate conducive to learning and producing productive citizens equipped for society.

By turning away from punitive disciplinary practices and zero-tolerance policies, the risks for misbehavior that lead to suspension, expulsion, academic failure, and potentially dropping out of school for the groups of students most adversely affected by such policies will decrease. As schools utilize, restorative practices students will benefit. As schools empower students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community to build healthy, positive relationships through the ability to address, confront, and resolve conflict amongst one another. This process also gives students the opportunity to develop skills that will allow them to gain social skills that will help them to mitigate and overcome negative social issues or situations.

Social-Emotional Learning

Overview

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined as the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions; feel and show caring and empathy for others; set and achieve positive goals; establish and maintain positive relationships; make responsible decisions; and handle challenging situations capably (Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2013; Zins & Elias, 2006).

Bandura's (1971) Social Learning Theory states that students' understanding, and analysis of social learning relies heavily upon their observation of behaviors and responses in the world around them. It “assumes that modeling influences produce learning principally through their formative functions and that observers acquire mainly symbolic representations of modeled activities” (p. 4). Building on his theory, the major premise of SEL is that emotional skills can be taught, modeled, and practiced across school environments. SEL focuses on developing five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

CASEL has designed and implemented a social and learning program with the five teachable principles previously listed to help students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful team members and problem solvers. According to CASEL (2013), SEL is based on rigorous research in multiple fields, clearly indicating that our emotions and relationships affect how and what we learn. According to CASEL (2013), there is a growing body of research that demonstrates SEL strategies promote

positive development among children and youth, reduces problem behaviors, and improves academic performance, citizenship, and health-related behavior. Infusing SEL into the school curriculum has been linked to positive changes in several aspects of students' lives, such as communication, emotional regulation, leadership, relationships with peers, relationships with staff, and overall social skills (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Zhai et al., 2015).

SEL and Academic performance

CASEL (2013) promotes that utilizing and modeling SEL competencies in schools will promote increased student achievement and improve student behavior. As adults address the social and emotional needs of students', behavior will become more aligned with desired norms and expectations without the use of punitive measures. The benefits from programs that utilize these competencies can vary based on the program and the population, and because each area of learning, both within and beyond SEL, is often in some way tied to another (e.g., reading comprehension can influence a student's ability to solve mathematics word problems; Jones & Kahn, 2017).

Our society has placed great emphasis on increasing academic rigor and expectations for student performance, but in many cases has not adapted to place emphasis on issues that may impact academic achievement that occurs outside of the academic environment. Darling-Hammond (2015) writes it is growing increasingly more important for schools to offer more than academic instruction to prepare students for life and work. As our Nation places an increased focus on students' academic success, the social and emotional needs of children have been largely ignored. Attentiveness to the

emotional well-being of students and character development has fallen by the wayside in an era of punitive accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2015).

Researchers have demonstrated that SEL plays a vital role in influencing nonacademic outcomes but also has a critical role in improving children's academic performance and lifelong learning (Zins et al., 2004). Analyses of recent school-based prevention programs provide general agreement that some of these programs are effective in reducing maladaptive behaviors and improving school success (Durlak and Wells, 1997; Durlak et al., 2011). Payton et al. (2008) conducted three large-scale reviews (of 317 studies involving 324,303 children) on the impact of SEL on elementary and middle-school students. The reviews demonstrated gains of 11–17 percentile points on achievement tests that demonstrated that SEL programs offer students a practical educational benefit. Durlak et al. (2011) conducted one meta-analysis of 213 school-based initiatives involving more than 270,000 students who participated in evidence-based SEL programs, and it showed an 11 percentile-point gain in academic achievement compared to students who did not participate in SEL programs. These reviews showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school for students who participated in SEL programs (Payton et al., 2008; Durlak et al., 2011).

SEL and Relationship building

Yoder (2014) writes that when students develop social-emotional competencies, they are more capable of seeking help when needed, managing their own emotions, and problem-solving difficult situations. All these attributes will contribute to the learning environment and equip students to increase their academic competencies. He continues

to state that we must teach to the whole child, which means that SEL skills must be not only taught but also consistently reinforced. Yoder further supports the point that the teaching and reinforcement of SEL skills has even greater importance for students living in under-resourced areas, both urban and rural, and that students in economically low income or low Socio-economic status (SES) face additional stressors that could further hinder academic achievement or advancement than students from more affluent areas. Yoder supports the premise that students' who come from disadvantaged families need additional support to assist them in developing skills to manage their emotions and navigate difficult situations. All children, regardless of SES, will benefit when they are exposed to SEL and experience its benefits, regardless of SES or other factors. However, there are some barriers and challenges unique to schools in lower SES areas that are worth considering regarding the level of need for SEL-type interventions. Establishing strong, healthy, and positive relationships between students and teachers can present itself as especially difficult within these schools.

It is necessary to add that SEL strategies are useful it is also important to notate that other factors that can, directly and indirectly, foster the improvements in behavior and support increased skills of interaction such as a more collectivist classroom environment with proactive classroom management, more supportive peer and adult relationships that place higher expectations on students, safer and more orderly classroom environments that encourage and praise positive behavior, and more caring relationships between the teacher and their students to create a stronger bond to their classroom and school community (Taylor, Weissberg, Oberle, & Durlak, 2017; Zhai et al., 2015).

SEL and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

SEL strategies are essential for low SES students for areas outside of academics. The adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and other obstructions that can accompany growing up in a lower SES area may impede the quality of instruction and level of academic achievement of low SES students. Proactive steps should be taken via effective and evidence-based interventions to help improve graduation rates and academic achievement levels in low SES schools, and SEL may very well be a crucial component of these improvements. Many experiences that children who grow up in poverty experience can be mitigated by equipping students with coping skills derived from SEL strategies. Adverse childhood experiences that are often associated with childhood poverty can refer to any form of long-term or multifaceted disadvantage or maltreatment throughout an individual's childhood (Hunt, Slack, & Berger, 2017).

Adverse childhood experiences can include a wide range of adversities such as chronic financial hardship, parental abuse or neglect, sexual abuse, or other unfavorable or potentially traumatic events that are witnessed or experienced by the child. In 2014 alone, over 700,000 children were reported as victims of childhood maltreatment (Hunt, Slack, & Berger, 2017). Although there are numerous types of ACEs and different populations who are exposed to them, low SES has been reported as the most frequent correlation of ACEs in children (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018).

Evans (2014) documents that in lower-income neighborhoods as young as two to four years of age have been shown to be 40% more likely to have interactions with aggressive peers in their neighborhoods and 25% more likely to interact with aggressive peers in childcare centers than children in middle-class neighborhoods. The level of

social support experienced in a family decreases with lower household income also decreases (Evans, 2014). Family structures and relationships play a significant role in contributing to the ACEs of low-income youth, leaving the potential for SEL strategies to help foster resilience in children and equip them to overcome adverse situations in their lives.

Families with parents or guardians who exhibit limited emotional support may produce children who pattern their behavior in a similar manner. This lack of modeling and teaching strong emotional support may cause their children to miss out on successfully gaining emotional skills and developing a strong sense of emotional intelligence. This can, in turn, cause them to miss out on the many benefits that social and emotional intelligence can contribute to becoming a successful and productive adult, unless emotional skills are presented to the child in the form of a specific intervention to provide these benefits, such as an SEL curriculum. It is challenging to prevent trauma that could be inflicted on children based upon their environment, but schools and communities can take steps to prevent ACEs from taking a toll on children's lives. Studies show that the more ACEs a child is exposed to, the higher the risk will be for behavioral issues and low academic achievement (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018), SEL is needed in low-income communities in order to provide protective factors through increased communication and relationship building, which can lessen the effects of ACEs on these students.

Summary

Promoting social and emotional development for all students in classrooms involves teaching and modeling social and emotional skills, providing opportunities for

students to practice and hone those skills, and giving students an opportunity to apply these skills in various situations. Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a foundation for safe and positive learning and enhances students' ability to succeed in school, careers, and life. According to CASEL Effective social and emotional learning programming involves coordinated classroom, schoolwide, family, and community practices that help students develop the following five essential skills: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible and Decision Making. SEL strategies equip students with increased social and emotional competence which can increase the likelihood of high school graduation, readiness for postsecondary education, career success, positive family and work relationships, better mental health, reduced criminal behavior, and engaged citizenship (e.g., Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2008; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

Overview

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) defined by Brunzell, Waters, and Stokes (2015) is damage to an individual from the consequences of trauma inflicted on a child during the adolescent years, that can have long-lasting adverse outcomes through adulthood. This research was initiated at an obesity clinic in San Diego, CA, to determine various causes of obesity but evolved into a twenty-five-year study focusing on the impact of adverse childhood experiences and how they affected people long term (Stevens, 2012, p. 1). In 1992, Felitti and Anda developed the Adverse Childhood Experience questionnaire that focused on ten questions divided into three categories: (1) physical, mental, or emotional abuse, (2) emotional and physical neglects, (3) household

dysfunction (Stevens, 2012). The ACE questionnaire resulted in a ‘measure of trauma experienced’ experienced as a child and the relationship between the total number of ACEs and health and social problems in one person's life (Murphy et al., 2014).

Effects of trauma

While multiple ACES exist, this research will focus on the effects of trauma relating crimes relating to and acts of violence in the home, neighborhood, and school regarding the impact on academic performance as measured by standardized test scores. Sporleder and Forbes (2016) research focuses explicitly on traumatic experiences and the effect on individuals who experience these events. Sporleder and Forbes explained that "Trauma is really the experience or perception of the event that leaves one feeling helpless or powerless" (p. 19). Complex trauma caused by prolonged multiple events, toxic stress, and children not having a caring adult in their lives (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016) both resulted in lower academic performance and negative consequences that lasted well into adulthood.

Traumatic stress in low SES areas can also impact a child's ability to engage and learn in a classroom setting and thus can negatively affect achievement levels. Researchers have found that fourth grade reading proficiency levels are much higher in students not eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL). Specifically, 45% of students that do not qualify for FRL scored at or above proficiency, while just 17% of eligible students scored at or above proficiency (Goodman, Miller, & West-Olatunji, 2012). The study also researched the impact of continued exposure to low SES environments on academic achievement. The research by Goodman et al. has linked SES in many cases has shown to have a direct correlation with achievement, whereas traumatic stress was shown to be

negatively correlated: the higher a student scored on the traumatic stress measure, the more likely they were to score low on academic achievement.

PTSD

If students that were impacted by the trauma had had a caring adult, mentor, advocate, or counselor in their lives, they would have had the opportunity to mitigate some of the adverse effects of the trauma before it led to long term consequences. Being involved in such trauma stressors as a youth-led to stress-related disorders with lasting outcomes. As Brunzell et al. (2015) described, “The American Psychiatric Association advises that directly experiencing trauma, witnessing a traumatic stressor, learning about traumatic events, or exposure to adverse details can lead to enduring, debilitating conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)” (p. 3).

ACES diagnoses rising

Recent statistics revealed ACE’s in nearly 60% of the United States population (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2015, p. 457). The number of children with ACE’s continued to grow as more entities become aware of the indicators and the potential impact. According to Bethell et al. (2014), “48 percent of U.S. children have at least one of the nine adverse childhood experiences evaluated in the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH).

Neighborhood violence and academic achievement

A growing body of research is being conducted on the connection between the potential educational impact of living in a violent neighborhood or attending a school with high levels of violence school. Numerous studies show that living in a neighborhood

with high levels of violence is associated with lower levels of academic achievement, lower levels of attendance in school as well as behavioral problems, such as aggression and depression that may hamper academic achievement (Guerra, Huesmann, and Spindler 2003, Harding 2010, Margolin and Gordis 2000).

Neighborhoods with high rates of violent crimes proportionally are neighborhoods with higher populations of socioeconomic disadvantage residents and lower graduation rates. A growing number of qualitative case studies in urban high schools focus on the consequences for school culture and organization of high violent crime rates and the security measures designed to prevent that violence (Kupchik 2010, Nolan 2011, Sullivan 2007). Sharkey (2010) connects lower academic achievement on cognitive exams following local acts of violence with homicides having the most adverse inverse correlations. Burdick-Will et al. (2011) documenting that moving families from areas of high crime low poverty neighborhoods to low crime middle income neighborhoods showed increased test scores over an extended period in Chicago and Baltimore than in New York, Los Angeles, and Boston.

Students living in neighborhoods that attend schools with crime rates are at a higher risk of being a victim based upon proximity. Therefore, violence permeates the social environment and can be detrimental to academic achievement, just as aggregate levels of poverty in a neighborhood are hypothesized to have effects on individual outcomes above and beyond the effect of individual economic resources, there are several reasons to believe that living in a neighborhood with high violent crime rates might shape individual educational achievement.

Violence affecting Social Organizations

High local violent crime rates in schools and neighborhoods are an indication of a social environment that generates a *risk* of victimization for any individual living or attending school in that area, regardless of that individual's direct involvement in a specific violent event. Violence is, therefore, seen as something that permeates a local social environment and shapes individual behavior and social interactions in ways that can be detrimental to academic achievement. Much as aggregate levels of poverty in a neighborhood are hypothesized to have effects on individual outcomes above and beyond the effect of individual economic resources, and there are a number of reasons to believe that living in a neighborhood with high violent crime rates might shape individual educational achievement.

Witnessing acts of violence, acts of violence that caused direct injury to close friends or relatives, or just hearing about violence near their person or their neighborhood is likely to make students feel unsafe and cause cognitive and emotional stress. High levels of cognitive stress can impair concentration, impair the storage of and accessing stored memories, which results in poor academic performance on standardized tests (Sauro, Jorgensen, and Pedlow 2003, Mattarella-Micke and Beilock in press). The increased focus on personal safety can also hinder students' focus on classroom activities or the long-term goals of educational success (Harding 2010b).

Violence often produces more violence

Students who are exposed to violence may also have an increased tendency for aggressive and disruptive behavior which could lead to disciplinary measures that would reduce the student's opportunity and access to academic instruction which could also lead

to lower academic performance and lower scores on standardized test (Bingenheimer, Brennan, and Earls 2005, Guerra, Huesmann, and Spidler 2003). Students who experience violence in their neighborhoods have a high propensity to display acts of violence and score lower on academic assessments (Craig, S., 2008). Through counseling and programs designed to equip students with the skills and confidence to help them compensate mentally and will help students to mitigate negative behavior, which could lead to acts of violence. Higher increases in academic on-task behavior will increase students' academic performance (Balfanz et al. 2014) and equip students with the skills and confidence to advance to High School.

Trust and social organizations

The presence of police officers and high-stakes, punitive discipline practices in schools with high violent crime rates may further undermine the moral order of schools, reducing students' trust in their teachers, and discouraging students from engaging fully in their own education and their school community (Kupchik 2010, Nolan 2011).

Neighborhoods that have higher rates of crime and violence don't just affect individuals but all the social organizations within that community, including the schools. Situations within the neighborhoods carry over into the school, causing disruptions, hindering instruction, and could make participants feel unsafe, which ultimately affects the academic achievement of the broader population. MacFarland (2001) states it is difficult for a single disruptive student to derail instruction, but many disruptive students can make it impossible for the teacher to maintain the necessary control and authority.

Alternate perspectives

For full disclosure, I must note that while I found research that shows correlations to violence affecting academic achievement, I was not able to find large amounts of research supportive conclusive long-term studies to document this, and most of the research was in large urban areas. Mainly Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. There have been a few experimental studies suggesting that living in a chronically violent neighborhood may not matter very much for student achievement (Sanbonmatsu et al. 2006, Oreopolous 2003, see also DeLuca and Dayton 2009). One of the primary differences is that some studies focus on poverty as a factor and not rates of crime or violence.

Need for cultural responsiveness

Students will require assistance in overcoming the traumatic effects of ACEs. Culturally sensitive Counselors in schools are needed to assist students. Considering the increasingly diverse student population in today's school system, the need for delivering culturally responsive counseling practices and being accountable for student success must become an everyday practice for school counselors (Dahir & Stone, 2009). Counselors who are multiculturally competent have the skill set to successfully work with culturally different clients (Ponterotte, Casas, Suzuki & Alexander, 2010; Sue et al., 1992). Research by Bemak et al. showed that combining culturally responsive practices with students experiencing low academic achievement showed a positive educational impact on student academic growth. Through the delivery of culturally responsive counseling services, school counselors can help in addressing issues of poor academic performance and educational injustices such as achievement gap Bemak & Chung, 2005.

Training for Counselors

The requirements for schools, counseling services they provide, and the areas of focus assigned to Counselors vary by State and in some cases, within districts. With wide-ranging foci, training varies. Regarding training for cultural responsiveness, Lee (2001) wrote, “Culturally responsive comprehensive guidance initiatives in schools should be based on two important premises: (1) All young people can learn and want to learn; and (2) cultural differences are real and cannot be ignored. A fundamental aspect of any comprehensive guidance approach, therefore, is understanding the cultural realities of children and their importance to academic, career, and personal-social development” (p. 258).

One of the more extensive counseling accreditation programs for culturally responsive training is The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016), with over 250 CACREP accredited school counseling programs and 880 accredited schools according to their website as of October 2019 in the United States. CACREP has developed standards that outline a shared set of knowledge and skills that are essential to the effective practice of school counseling to meet a variety of student needs, including culturally responsive practices. Schools that effectively implement the standards of CACREP will demonstrate characteristics such as creating a sense of community, embracing diversity, staffing diverse educators who partake in professional development, and broadly defining cultural diversity all have contributed to producing a culturally responsive environment. This connection to understand and an understanding of their environment and potential adverse children

experiences students could possibly face allow counselors to help better and equip students for social, emotional, and academic success.

Summary

Our experiences and influencers help to shape and mold us into the people that become. Ideally, if children are placed in a warm, safe, loving environment, they will blossom to become fully actualized individualized equipped to pursue their dreams and make a positive impact on the world around them. Unfortunately, this is not always what occurs. Many people have adverse childhood experiences that hinder their development and are negatively impacted well into adulthood, thus being robbed of their best life and not being able to expose the world to the gifts and talents that could have benefited society.

Nearly half of children currently report and are being diagnosed with some form of trauma or pain that has impacted them. Most adults will attest that negative experiences are part of life; it is how we process our experiences that determine how well we are able to move beyond those negative experiences. Some people will move beyond negative experiences unphased, and some will become better while others will move beyond those experiences feeling helpless. Violence that affects those individuals personally, close family and friends, or those in near proximity are often experiences that leave individuals in a state of helplessness. When a child experiences uncontrollable acts of violence throughout their life, their bodies function with elevated levels of stress that affect them and all the social organizations within their communities. Stores will close at a particular time, added security measures (cashiers behind bulletproof glass, burglar bars, and others) become routine as well as affecting the schools.

In areas of high violence, students can be more focused on safety and survival instead of academic pursuit, which ultimately affects academic achievement in the schools. The violence from the community begets violence in the schools as students bring unresolved issues from the community, and those that were affected act out based upon a combination of learned behavior and frustration by how they are personally affected.

To protect people within the schools, it is a common practice to enact security measures such as metal detectors and personnel, which often creates a greater level of distrust. Schools in areas of high crime and violence have the job of mitigating adverse childhood experiences so they can create an environment that is conducive to academic achievement and advancement.

Benefits of School Counseling

Overview

Children of low-income parents are more prone to live in impoverished environments and experience adverse effects on their development and academic attainment (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Dixon & Frolovra, 2011). Marquis-Hobbs (2014) explains that in the United States, “one of every five public schools is classified as high-poverty as reported by the U.S. Department of Education” (p.34). The trauma that children from impoverished communities are exposed to place them in danger of severe emotional and academic consequences that can impact their future with negative consequences (Evans, Li, & Whipple, 2013). Some of the social and mental

consequences include developmental delays, behavior problems, and poor school outcomes (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Marquis-Hobbs, 2014).

Exposure to early childhood trauma has been established as a marker of developmental risk over time (Briere & Spinazzola, 2009; Perry, 2008). Cycles tend to repeat themselves. If a parent was reared in a trauma-impacted neighborhood, their children have a higher risk of being reared in a trauma-impacted area. (Elsevier, 2010; Franklin et al., 2010).

According to Evans (2004), professionals in public health, medicine, and psychology have begun to value the importance of studying the effects of poverty on children from an ecological perspective. Evans maintains that the environmental factors that are most detrimental to children include exposure to high-risk neighborhoods, inadequate housing, domestic violence, and ineffective school personnel. Children from low-SES families are also more likely to live with parents who have trouble coping with and managing the stress associated with their economic conditions.

Because children spend most of their time in schools rather than at home, one solution to the concerns about limited access to mental health resources is for schools to offer School Mental Health (SMH) programs. Pre-established universal systems such as schools and early childhood education programs are uniquely positioned to respond and meet the needs of students that have been affected by traumatic occurrences in their lives. In many instances, parents or primary caregivers are not equipped with the skills or capabilities to support individuals in their care or be consistent in ensuring proper interventions are taking place, but schools are places that are familiar to trauma-impacted

children (Liew, 2012). School Mental Health (SMH) programs are intended to address the behavioral and emotional challenges of children in high poverty school districts (Baker-Ericzen et al., 2013).

History of the school counselor

The school counselor role began before the 1920s when there was a focus on school personnel assisting with social, emotional, and predominately vocational guidance as they assisted students in various careers (Gysbers, 2004). In the late 1960s, Norman Gyspers and his colleagues (Gysbers, 2004; Gysbers & Lapan, 2003) started writing a model school counseling program that would eventually evolve into the basis for the American School Counselor Association National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2005). Since then, the role of the school counselor has evolved to include higher risk emotional needs and crisis management.

Current role of the school Counselor

The current role varies depending on the placement of the school counselor. The expectations and responsibilities vary based on whether the counselor works with elementary, middle, or high school students (Akos, 2005; Sink 2005). The school counselor role includes the following: supporting student academic success, monitoring student assessment results, demonstrating the value of services, supporting student transitions, establishing relationships with students, parents, and school personnel, identifying barriers to student success, teaching guidance lessons, and showing accountability through programs and interventions.

In addition to complying with academic concerns, a professional school counselor today is considered a school-based resource who has the knowledge and skills necessary to identify, intervene, consult with and refer students who present emotional and behavioral concerns (Gruman, Marston, Koon, 2013). The school counselor's role as a mental health resource might serve as a viable component to the promotion of School Mental Health Programs (SMH). It is noteworthy to add that some schools are separating academic counseling roles from the roles of what they are classifying as professional counselors, which focus more on mental health concerns.

Supporting Academic success

School counselors build on the student's experiences and are in a unique position to impact self-concept development, academic achievement, peer interactions, and personal challenges that occur daily (College Board, 2011; Scales, 2005; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). School counselors should identify achievement gaps and develop interventions designed to ensure student success (Hartline & Cobia, 2012).

Supporting emotional success

Gonzalez (2005) reported that children across our nation suffer from an array of mental health disorders, and the risk is exacerbated by low-income children and children of color. Increased symptoms are due to daily exposure to community crime, gang-induced violence, neighborhood drug infestation, and substandard housing conditions. Therefore, there is a need for prompt and efficient access to mental health services for children from low-SES families (Gonzalez, 2005). However, the availability of mental health services is disproportionately lower than the estimated rate of mental health disorders among children from low socioeconomic environments (Gonzalez, 2005)

School counselors are uniquely positioned to support students who are impacted emotionally by exposure to poverty (Ansari, 2012; Bray & Schommer-Aikins, 2015; Shimoni & Greenberger, 2014). It is crucial to supply counselors the necessary tools to meet the emotional needs of students from impoverished communities because they could typically be affected by multiple ACES that influence learning, including violence, crime, inadequate housing, and unemployment (Funkhouser, 2012). If the needs of these students are not met, they could potentially fail to be positive contributors to society.

Summary

As times change, so systems must change with them to remain viable in meeting the purpose in which they were designed. Initially, the role of the school counselor was developed when students typically had more support and home and within the community. The job of the school counselor in this setting was to identify the talents and desires of the students in their charge and match that desire with a vehicle that created a potentially lucrative future for that student. As times evolve, the role of the counselor has evolved with it. The role of the counselor today is multifaceted. Today's counselor needs to be able to align student schedules with a track for graduation, identify academic deficits that could hinder academic performance, identify social, emotional, and mental deficiencies, and institute interventions that will help ensure student success. Some of the counselor roles have been divided into academic and professional counseling positions based upon the potential enormity of the role.

In today's 21st Century Schools, counselors can help teachers address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The emotional support side of the counseling role should help students overcome adverse childhood experiences that create

trauma so that students can mitigate and overcome social and emotional events, thereby equipping students with the tools to successfully integrate and contribute to society. In addition to ensuring that each child is given the opportunity to achieve academic success, delivering culturally responsive practices places school counselors in a unique position of creating an equitable school climate (Pica-Smith & Poynton, 2014). By working with the entire school community, school counselors can provide services that are culturally sensitive to meet the academic, social/emotional, and career needs of all students.

Chapter III – Methodology

Qualitative research is a research strategy that allows for concepts and theories to be built on the collected data rather than testing a hypothesis (Patton, 2015). This qualitative case study did not seek to test a hypothesis; rather it sought to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions on the impact of social and emotional support services on academic performance and the potential effect on middle-school-age children who live in an urban neighborhood with high rates of violence from their own, personal perceptions and experiences

For our Nation to advance and create a platform where everyone will have an opportunity for success, all students must be academically prepared. If we fail to empower students to be successful adults, our Nation will be at a disadvantage against other Nations that have a better-prepared workforce. Whenever students are not prepared academically, they will be underprepared to be competitive in a global market to excel economically. A Nation's utilization of its human potential is one of the determining factors in its prosperity (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010).

This research will add to the body of evidence of the perceptions of teachers on the impact of increased social and emotional support services in the form of peer group counseling and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance in middle school of students living in a high-crime urban area? The lack of literature in this specific area created an opportunity for the researcher to collect the perceptions of teachers involved in the implementation of social and emotional support to students and their perception of how these supports contribute to student academic success.

Research Question

What is the perception of teachers of the impact of increased social and emotional learning support services in the form of peer group counseling utilizing restorative circles and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of my research revolves around restorative practices in education, and the perception of teachers on how meeting the social and emotional needs of students affects their academic performance. Restorative practices (RP) are the overarching philosophy and actions that regard relationships and learning from harm as paramount in any community setting (Hulvershorn, 2018). The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) defines RP as including the use of “informal and formal processes and practices that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing” (Wachtel, 2016, p. 1).

Research Design

A qualitative case study design was chosen for this research study. The research is taking place in a single school that moved from a zero-tolerance behavior management approach to supporting the social and emotional development of students to manage their own behavior. One of the perceived benefits of the increased benefits would also be increased academic performance of students. The data will be collected through a purposeful sampling of core content teachers that have taught at the school for a minimum of five years and experienced the change from zero-tolerance to utilizing SEL strategies. The principal researcher will share their observations of the effectiveness

based upon fitting the criteria. The study will be exploratory to gauge perceptions of educators on the benefit of meeting social and emotional needs of students to build the whole child and in turn also increase academic performance.

This aligns with the Interpretive Theory framework to collect teachers' perceptions of how implementing social and emotional support impacts academic performance. The research design began with the submission to and approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Houston's main campus. The investigation was conducted during the 2019-2020 school year. After receiving approval, the researcher interviewed four content teachers in the areas of Math, Reading, Science, and Social Studies to gauge their perceptions of the impact of the implementation of social and emotional support services to students and how those services impacted student academic performance during that school year.

The work is guided by Creswell and Poth (2017) and Patton (2015). The design of the study is a *Qualitative study* based upon the utilization of an open-ended interview question concerning their perceptions of the success of restorative practices using social and emotional learning support services and its effect on academic performance.

The use of a case study allowed the principal researcher to focus the study on a specific group of educators located in a specific school. Even though this case study contains multiple interview subjects, it was designed as a singular case study due to the participants belonging to a single group (Creswell, 2015). Case studies used in the educational setting are commonly geared toward teaching, learning, or curriculum (Merriam, 1998). Descriptive case studies present complete descriptions of phenomena within their context (Patton, 2015). Creswell (2015) describes case studies as a

methodological design by which the researcher can explore a case or phenomenon using comprehensive data collection of multiple sources. The sources can include interviews and surveys. Once the data is collected, the researcher describes the case or phenomenon using the themes that have emerged that leads to a final theory (Creswell, 2015).

A one-on-one interview was conducted to elicit a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions surrounding the impact of these supports and interventions. A follow-up interview will be conducted to verify that the perceptions were accurate and allow clarifying any misgivings. Last, the researcher will conduct a focus group interview with the research, participants to develop a collective understanding of the perceptions of the teachers.

In this case study, the same group of students received increased social and emotional support to include access to full-time counselors available to them at school over a multiple-year period. Developmentally, the expectations of the counselor's role differ from campus to campus. In this situation, the counselor was not assigned testing or scheduling duties but was specifically on campus to provide social and emotional support to students. Although the counselors were supplying social and emotional support, the belief was that this support would bolster the academic scores of the students as they were better able to cope with and internally mitigate frustrations and outside interferences. The primary purpose of this research is to gauge the perception of teachers on the impact of increased social and emotional support services in the form of peer group counseling and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance?

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method designs are commonly used in educational research. Each design offers differing strategies and approaches that provide specific direction for the procedure of the chosen research design (Creswell, 2015). This qualitative study is a case study that is appropriate based upon it being focused on a group of educators who were working in the same school. A case study involves an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of an individual or individuals. A case study examines the related contextual conditions of an individual or individuals. This case study was designed to be an in-depth examination of the perceptions and experiences of a select sampling of educators as a representation of the group to ascertain the perceptions of the teachers regarding the impact of social and emotional support on the impact of academic performance.

The location of the study will be in an urban Middle School (6-8) with a large low-income high minority student population. The potential outcome of this research has implications in reducing the academic achievement gap that exists between low-income minority students and their counterparts in higher-income areas. Gall et al. (2014) declared that qualitative research would help us to learn the nature of meaning connected with social phenomena. The research procedures performed in my case study will be surveys, follow up interviews, and analysis of public record assessment data derived from Texas Academic Progress Reports (TAPR) through the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Interpretive Theory

Interpretive theory provided the researcher the framework to explore the stakeholders' (teachers') perceptions of the teachers on the impact of increased social and

emotional support services in the form of peer group counseling and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance?

According to the Sociology Index, Interpretive theory includes symbolic interactionism, labeling, ethnomethodology, phenomenological sociology, and social construction of reality. Interpretive theory is typically contrasted with structural theories that claim to remove the subjectivity of the actor and the researcher and assume that human behavior can best be understood as determined by the pushes and pulls of structural forces. Researchers that utilize interpretive theory utilize practices that analyze perspectives and theories spanning the fields of communication, sociology, anthropology, education, cultural studies, political science, history, and the humanities. Interpretive theories sometimes referred to as interpretivism or philosophical interpretivism, are orientations to social reality based on the goal of understanding.

Practitioners of interpretive theory are often referred to as interpretivists and generally focus on the following areas (a) scholars who are interested in the ways communities, cultures, or individuals create meaning from their actions, rituals, interactions, and experiences; (b) scholars who wish to interpret local meanings by locating them into a broader historical, geographical, political, linguistic, ideological, economic, and cultural milieu; (c) researchers who look at the meanings of texts and the codes and rules (Vannini, 2009). Interpretive theory is more accepting of free will and sees human behavior as the outcome of the subjective interpretation of the environment. Interpretive theory is an ontological and epistemological tool used in research to collect and interpret individuals' and groups' perceptions, thoughts, and feelings based upon their everyday life, practice, experience, and communication (Frick, 2013). The framework

allowed the principal investigator to collective perceptions regarding the academic and behavioral impact of social and emotional interventions and supported to be collected.

Participants

The participants in this study included several groups; secondary school counselors, teachers, and students who work or attend school in an urban city within the United States. While multiple participants were involved. A purposeful or selective sampling design was utilized to select the participants that would be interviewed. The most qualified teachers to answer the interview question were 8th grade core content teachers who taught students that had received social and emotional learning support services throughout middle school. Each teacher interviewed represented one 8th grade core content area: math, reading, science, and social studies.

The secondary school counselors work in school settings with students in grades six through eight. The initial counselor that began with the program had previous experience working with elementary students in a full-time capacity and was paid directly from the school as a District employee. The subsequent counselors were full-time counselors assigned to the school from a faith-based partnership and received funding through the partnering organization that received grants and funding from insurance companies. The counselors that are currently at the school are a combination of a full-time counselor that works directly for the school and received funding from the local budget and one of the private counselors from the previous year that is funded through the faith-based partnership.

The teaching staff for that cohort of students was 15 teachers with work experience in the teaching field that spanned teachers with experience that ranged from 2 to 29 years. The teachers came from varied backgrounds and except for one, were certified in their teaching discipline. The teachers were given an overview of the need for peer-group counseling and given an 8-hour training on how to conduct peer group sessions. For the research study, a sampling of 4 teachers was used as a representation of the group. The teachers that were chosen will be described in greater detail in chapter 4 and will be referenced as Jessica, Sally, Michael, and Rob.

Each participant was initially asked by the principal researcher to take part in a research study about perceptions of the impact of social and emotional support services on academic performance because you meet the following criteria of being an 8th grade core academic content teacher that instructed students that received social and emotional support services for two years prior to their 8th grade year. Participation in the research was completely voluntary and involved two sets of interviews. The initial interview had open-ended response questions with a follow-up interview to clarify responses. Each interview did not exceed 45 minutes. Last was a focus group interview composed of all participants that were willing to participate that did not exceed 60 minutes. The total time of participation did not exceed more than 3 hours.

The location of the study will be in an urban Middle School (6-8) that has a Title 1 designation. 79.3% of the student population are labeled low-income. The student body ethnicity is nearly 100% minority, composed as follows: Hispanic 84.5%, African American 14.8%, two or more races 0.4%. The school has an economically disadvantaged population of 97%, according to the Texas Education Agency. According

to the HoustonTX.gov Police Department reports, the area averages more than 80 crimes per month in the areas of burglary, theft, assault, which would be considered higher than average. The population of the school is between 900 and 950 students.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

According to Creswell and Poth (2008), a Likert scale is an orderly scale from which respondents choose the option that best supports their opinion. It can be used to measure someone's attitude by measuring the extent to which they agree or disagree with a question or statement.

Interviews based upon pre-determined open-ended questions will be conducted with a purposeful sampling of four teachers. Observations from the principal researcher were included as well. Each of these will be given an overview of the research, how their position played a part in the research, and be allowed to ask questions. A brief purpose of the interview will be repeated at the start of the survey. Following the purpose statement was an acknowledgment that the interview is voluntary, and individual respondent data will be anonymous, and legal names will not be reported but coded as teachers 1, 2, 3, and 4. The interviews will commence with each teacher being asked to describe their teaching background and then asked, "What are your perceptions of Restorative practices and Social-Emotional Learning," followed the remaining interview questions.

The interview will have specific questions to determine to what extent the teachers perceived social and emotional support services benefited students and contributed to their being able to mitigate negative distractions in their lives and identify

strengths that can be leveraged to increase their academic performance. Several questions will be open response to assess possible ways to make the program better and increase academic performance. Participants will have the option to discontinue the interview at any time.

The purpose of doing this process was to interview and gather feedback from the teachers who worked with the students. The researcher conducted subsequent interviews with the teachers to receive feedback on any part of the survey that was not clear and to share if any additional information that may be pertinent to the study needed to be included. Based on additional data received, the data will be modified to clarify the results. A final group interview was conducted.

One-on-one and Focus Group Interviews

Teacher perceptions were captured using open-ended questions during the one-on-one interviews and focus group interview, which provided the teachers an opportunity to respond to how they perceive the impact of increased social and emotional support services and its impact on student academic performance. The one-on-one interviews were face to face in October of 2019. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and was recorded. Audio recordings will be uploaded to the researcher's personal computer and an audio file created. The audio file was transcribed and coded based upon key terms and themes that emerge from each interview. Research participants were emailed a summary of the questions and answers for member checks and given follow up interviews to clarify any misunderstandings and allowed additional items or comments to be added. The audio file and transcript of the interviews remained under password protection with the principal researcher until the project was completed.

Aliases were created for each research participant, where they were referred to as Jessica, Sally, Michael, and Rob. The same initial research interview questions were used in all interviews; however, the questions were adjusted when appropriate to elicit additional information from the participants. While the research question protocol was followed with every interview, follow-up questions varied based upon the specific answers to receive clarification on points. Follow-up questions were not scripted and were a part of the natural conversation. A few examples of follow-up questions were:

1. Can you tell me more about why you said?
2. Can you elaborate on this topic?
3. How does this comment connect to (a previous comment)

The focus group interview followed the same protocol as the one-on-one interviews. The focus group took place in November of 2019 with all four of the participants. The focus group was face to face taking approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. Participants were asked questions allowing each teacher to respond and build upon the dialogue of their colleagues. Follow-up questions, like the examples previously given, were asked during the conversation when needed. No other changes were made to the question protocol.

Coding

A coding format was developed upon completion of the first set of interviews. Saldaña (2013) writes, “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). For this research study, codes were assigned to each pertinent piece of data, key terms, or themes as they develop

in the interviews and focus group interviews. Data associated with the general perceptions of teachers was identified using this method. Next, categories will be developed to place the various codes into similar content or like connections. These categories will be determined using an on-going analysis of the coded data.

This cohort group also given specified times of advocacy where they met in small groups to share and discuss feelings and events that occurred in the neighborhood. The entire cohort of students had advocacy time where they met collectively with their peers and an adult moderator. All students had access to individual counseling throughout the school day. Students that were not enrolled in the school 50% or more of the school year were excluded from the data as well as students who were not there the previous year, so they would be the independent variable. The core group of students who attended the school for consecutive years that had access to the peer advocacy groups and counseling services are the dependent variable.

The American Psychological Association supports research that teaching social and emotional skills to inner-city students can contribute to their academic achievement, new evidence shows. The project involved all students enrolled in regular or bilingual education in an inner-city school system where 2 out of 3 students qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch, and 9 out of 10 students are African American or Hispanic/Latino American which was well within the demographics of the parameters of the school population per the data retrieved from the data from TAPR.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data collection began in October of 2019. Participants took part in one-to-one interviews on their background, training, and perceptions of teachers on their perceptions of the impact of increased social and emotional support services in the form of peer group counseling and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance (appendix C). Transcripts of the interviews were made and used as the guide for a second interview designed as a member check to clarify answers and perceptions of the teachers. The second interviews took place within two weeks of the initial interviews. Last was a focus group where the participants came together to discuss Restorative practices and how they could be better applied to benefit the population of students that were being served at this school.

Transcripts of the one-to-one interviews were created and stored in the computer of the principal researcher. The computer the transcripts and all identifying information of the participants was password protected with the password known only to the principal researcher. None of the participants identified any discrepancies in the transcribing of the interview details.

Trustworthiness

The data was deemed reliable and trustworthy based upon the voluntary opinions offered by the participants. The participants were free to respond openly because the interviews are anonymous and would not be shared with their supervisors. Member checks were utilized to verify the meaning and intent of all participants. Each participant was given the opportunity to make modifications, corrections, add to or alter their

opinions or change their perceptions throughout the process. Participants were also given the option of withdrawing their participation at any point.

The data that referenced school ratings was derived from TAPR which monitors and validates data and state achievement test scores. The chain of custody of test documents ensured the answer choices from the students were appropriately recorded based upon their best effort and scored correctly with no errors. The last component of ensuring that the results are valid would be with the researcher in analyzing and the coding of the data.

Summary

The United States is on a trajectory of losing the title of being the land of opportunity to becoming like so many other places where it is a land of haves and have not. The academic achievement gap is widening, and as it continues will limit the potential of not only numerous citizens but the growth of our Nation. The challenge is more significant than students not being academically successful. The lack of being prepared to contribute to society will decrease the GDP of our Nation, hinder the ability of the Nation to pay off an ever-increasing National debt, and stifle the economic growth needed to continue as a superpower.

People are born with various proclivities, talents, and intellect that can benefit society. Our system of education should nurture those areas and help students to maximize them. To be successful in this endeavor, we, as educators and members of society, must identify and work to remove constraints that hinder this from occurring. The children of many Americans who are classified as low socio-economic wage earners

living in the inner city have specific challenges that are initiated in their communities and carried into the schools.

For schools to successfully educate students, we must first help students by meeting their social and emotional needs so they can better focus on academic pursuits. Peer group sessions and access to counseling services will help in the process. As Maslow states in his hierarchy of needs, learning cannot take place until basic needs of safety, security, and sustenance are met. This project is designed to gauge how increased social support services in the form of peer group counseling and access to counseling services impact student academic performance.

Chapter IV

Presentation of Data and Results

Chapter 4 focuses on the data and results of the research study. This chapter will begin with a description of the data collection process. Which will be followed by a detail of the participants and how the data was gathered and recorded. Last will be the findings related to the research questions detailing findings, relationships, and themes that arose. The purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore the perception of teachers of the impact of increased social and emotional learning support services in the form of peer group counseling utilizing restorative circles and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance.

Data collection process

Teacher perceptions were captured using open-ended questions during the one-on-one interviews and focus group interview, which provided the teachers an opportunity to respond to how they perceive the impact of increased social and emotional support services and its impact on student academic performance. The one-on-one interviews were face to face in October of 2019. Each interview was recorded and lasted approximately thirty minutes. Audio recordings were uploaded to the researcher's personal computer and an audio file created. Each audio file was transcribed and coded based upon key terms and themes that emerge from each interview. Research participants were emailed a summary of the questions and answers for member checks and given follow up interviews to clarify any misunderstandings and allow additional items or comments. The audio file and transcript of the interviews remained under password protection with the principal researcher until the completion of the project.

Aliases were created for each research participant, where they will be referenced to as Jessica, Sally, Michael, and Rob. The same initial interview questions were used in all interviews; however, the questions were adjusted when appropriate to elicit additional information from the participants. While the interview question protocol was followed with every interview, follow-up questions will vary based upon the specific answers to receive clarification on specific points. Follow-up questions were not scripted and were a part of the natural conversation.

The focus group interview followed the same protocol as the one-on-one interviews. The focus group took place in November of 2019, with all four of the participants. The focus group was face to face taking approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. Participants were asked questions allowing each teacher to respond and build upon the dialogue of their colleagues. Follow-up questions, like the examples previously given, were asked during the conversation when needed. No other changes were made to the interview protocol.

Participants

The participants in this study were four teachers at a middle school in a large urban area in the State of Texas. Each teacher represented a core academic content area in Math, Algebra, English Language Arts, and United States History. Each of the teachers involved in the study taught 8th-grade students the majority of whom had been at the school since the sixth grade. All the teachers interviewed taught at the school for a minimum of 5 years experienced a change from zero-tolerance centered policies to policies based around restorative practices (RP), social and emotional learning (SEL)

with an emphasis on restorative circles and access to full-time counselors on campus.

The teachers that were chosen are referenced as Jessica, Sally, Michael, and Rob.

Jessica

Jessica was born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley region of Texas. She attended primary school, secondary school, and University in that region. Jessica began her teaching career in the Rio Grande Valley in a school that had a predominately homogenous Hispanic population with students of a similar economic grouping. After doing her student teaching in the Rio Grande Valley, she moved to the urban area where she currently resides and has been teaching at this school for five years. Jessica was hired to teach English Language Arts. Her first year in this teaching assignment, she took over a classroom in January that had been without a teacher for three months. She is proud of this experience because the students were incredibly challenging but responded to her emotionally, and she was able to build relationships that allowed students to be successful.

Sally

Sally is a native of this urban setting that she is now teaching. Sally attended schools and attended a local University. Sally has been teaching for a total of 7 years, all of which have been in the same school. Sally taught 6th-grade math for two years and then 8th-grade math and Algebra 1. Some of the experiences that Sally is most proud of is having been chosen to represent her school as Teacher of the Year and the tremendous success of her students who routinely score well above Local and State averages the majority of which score at the mastery level.

Michael

Michael was not only born and raised in this urban area but also attended neighboring schools and went to a University within 10 miles of the school that he is currently teaching. Michael has taught United States history for six years. Teaching is his second career, and this is the only school that he has taught. One of the things that he is proud of is the relationships that he has formed with the students and the team collaboration effort that has created culturally relevant lessons that have directly contributed to student academic growth. The lessons are engaging and challenge students building reasoning skills within students that promote academic success that will equip them to be successful in High School and in life.

Rob

Rob is a native of this urban area and a native of the environment of the school. Rob attended the middle school that he is teaching, as well as graduated from the high school that the students are zoned to attend. Rob has 19 years of service, all of which were at this same school. Rob has taught students of all levels in both 6th grade and 8th-grade math. Throughout the years, Rob instructed students who were new to the Country with limited to no English vocabulary to mainstreamed students. Rob did not measure success by percentage of passing or mastering the STAAR (although his students performed well). He looked at small accomplishments highlighting that his proud moments were when one of his students completed an entire assignment. The student was happy saying that was the first time they focused and applied themselves to complete their work, which made Rob happy. Rob had won teacher of the year, been department

chair, and achieved numerous other accolades but considered a success when a student felt empowered and confident in being able to apply the skills they had mastered.

Findings related to the interview questions

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore the perception of teachers of the impact of increased social and emotional learning support services in the form of peer group counseling utilizing restorative circles and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance. The interview questions were used to ascertain information about the participants, training they had undergone, and gauge the perception of the teachers on the impact of services being implemented and their impact on academic performance.

The analysis of the data revealed several key findings or themes:

1. The teachers did not feel that they were given thorough training on how to properly implement social and emotional strategies.
2. The teachers agreed that supporting the social and emotional development of students was important and should be consistently implemented schoolwide to achieve maximum benefits.
3. The teachers perceived that having good relationships with their students had a positive impact on academic performance, although to what degree varied.
4. The teachers did not have a strong perception that access to counseling services contributed to increasing academic achievement for students.
5. Only half of the teachers involved contributed a direct connection of student success with the SEL strategies that were utilized.

Interpretations of the Findings

The findings generated from the one-on-one interviews and the focus group were analyzed using interpretive theory as the theoretical framework, guided by the research questions. As highlighted in Chapter 4, the participants of this study were 8th teachers at a middle school in a large urban district that worked at a school that switched from a zero-tolerance based policy to the implementation of restorative practices using social and emotional learning support strategies, restorative circles and full time counselors to help support students emotional needs.

Theme 1

Teachers received thorough training on how to properly implement SEL strategies

All the teachers agreed that training within the school or from the district was minimal. An overview was given on how RP and SEL strategies benefitted students. The most training surrounding RP and SEL received was on how to conduct circles where they were placed in small groups where circles were modeled, and teachers were given a protocol to follow (appendix D). Michael shared that when he asked for assistance, he was given guidance on how to better implement circles. Through trial and error, he has been able to refine what works best for him. Jessica believes that most teachers respond to students based upon their past experiences. Sally, who stated in question 2 that she does not believe the full strategies are being implemented, studied RP when she was an undergraduate student and applies what she recalls from prior learning how to best implement strategies in her classroom for her students.

Theme 2

Supporting SEL was important and should be consistently implemented schoolwide to maximize results

The teacher's perceptions of this question were divided evenly. Sally shared that the introduction of RP was initially viewed as a negative change that was demotivating to teachers who felt that students were no longer receiving consequences for their behavior. Sally shared that RP takes more work from staff members, and some teachers did not see this as part of their job description. RP strategies took more effort and are more intensive than the zero-tolerance policies that were previously in place. RP is rooted in relationship building and supporting the whole child instead of a formula of if A then B. Sally believed that from an academic standpoint, the school had experienced teachers who would ensure the students would succeed regardless of what program was being implemented.

Jessica believed that Teachers who took the time to develop relationships with students would see overall academic gains. The success schoolwide depended on the teacher and how well they subscribe to RP and how broadly they implemented the practices. Some teachers would not participate because they did not see the need or value in restorative practices. As an example of how the strategies worked effectively, she cited how a math teacher who had a student that had been in the Country for two years and English was their second language. This teacher took the time to build a relationship with the student and not only taught them but helped them to be successful on the standardized test at the end of the year.

It is of interest to note that the teacher Jessica referenced was Rob, who did not perceive that the strategies were effective. During the focus group, Rob argued that he did not utilize SEL strategies; instead he took the time to form relationships and learn more about his students.

Michael said overall; he was sure that the school had been impacted in a positive way although he had not been able to see anything concrete to quantify his perceptions, he felt that the atmosphere of the school had been more positive than in the past. Students were enjoying coming to school. In the past students came out of compliance, but now the school had been able to establish stability, staff members listened to students and allowed students to express themselves more, which increased the morale of the students.

Rob did not feel that the practices that were being instituted had made an impact on academic performance. The school had implemented SEL strategies, but the school also had greater stability in staff. As the staff matures and becomes more competent professionally, they were better able to make an impact academically and better support students. Some of these strategies may have helped, but the maturity of the staff is what had contributed to academic growth.

“A good teacher knows what they need to do to get the job done. If I have a relationship with a kid that’s great, but relationship or now I have to get my kids to perform because that’s how I will continue to get paid.” Rob

Theme 3

Having good relationships with their students positively impacts academic performance

Every teacher agreed that relationships impacted academic achievement, but how and to what degree depended on the student. Sally stated that while relationships were meaningful, she was less enthusiastic about the level of benefit a good relationship had on academic performance. Sally said that not every student would have a relationship with the teacher that was either positive or negative, but students who were self-motivated would typically perform well. Some students were not talkative (they would sit quietly in class) but were doing well academically. Other students that she had relationships with were not doing as well academically. The teacher did not feel that relationships were essential and that a level of respect must be established for any productive relationship.

Jessica believed that the relationship was the crux to any teaching successful teaching relationship. When a poor relationship exists, students will shut down. Even higher-performing students will not perform well because they felt that they were somehow getting back at the teacher by not performing well. Jessica shared how students told her that they failed classes or performed poorly on a test because they thought it would negatively impact the teacher.

“Many of our babies don’t have anyone at home to nurture them because their parent work too so much. They need someone positive to love them and speak into their lives.” – Jessica

Michael answered that depending on the level or grade that is being taught, younger students were especially impressionable and would feed off the energy of the teacher. If a teacher had students that were not motivated no matter how good the lesson is, if students were not disciplined or willing to work, they were not going to perform well. Especially in the case of a teacher who was strict and did not have a good

relationship with their students. Troubled students will work harder for a teacher that they respect.

Rob said that some kids would try harder if they had a good relationship with the teacher, but that is typically solely when students were in the presence of the teacher. A kid may want to impress a teacher in class, but homework or other items that needed to be done were less critical when the teacher was not around. The kids tried to make him proud in that moment in his presence. The desire to impress the teacher may not carry over the long term. For example, biological children may want to please their parents continually because of the type of relationship bonds they have. Rob asked the question “realistically how deep of a relationship can you have with students to make long term impact.”

Theme 4

Access to counseling services contributed to increased academic achievement

Of the four teachers, Jessica was the only teacher that related a direct impact of counseling services affecting the classroom environment and impacting academic performance. Jessica cited a specific situation where a student was in crisis mode, and the counselor was able to support the student through the situation and coach Jessica how to better support the student through the process. Jessica says the current counselor is very supportive and active in the school, which is helpful. Students that are going to be rebellious are going to do so regardless, but students who are having outburst for cause have added support, downtime, and access to get the help they need. According to Bloom's taxonomy, when students' needs are not met, they will not be focused on

academics, so access to counseling services helps students to meet a basic set of needs so they can be productive.

Michael and Rob stated that many of their students were more emotionally stable. Prior to counselors in the school, some students were more prone to outburst that was not conducive to the academic environment. They do not know if this is due to counseling or SEL strategies.

“To me if a student has serious problems, which some of our kids do, it is going to take years of counseling to help them get better. At least this gets them some help where they are more stable.” – Michael

Rob went on to add that due to privacy issues, most of the teachers do not know the students that are receiving counseling services unless they are pulled from their classes so and, therefore, cannot clearly answer the question. Michael also stated that even if students were receiving counseling services, many issues that are deep-rooted take an extensive amount of time to resolve. Sally concurred with Michael and Rob in the fact that she does not connect counseling services with academic growth. Sally added that in some cases where students were consistently pulled from her classes to receive services, their academic growth regressed.

Theme 5

SEL strategies contribute to increased academic achievement

Three out of four teachers interviewed perceived that building relationships with students, which was the crux behind RP and SEL strategies, impacted academic achievement, and affected how students adhere to or comply with behavioral norms. Sally believed that when students had a good relationship with their teachers, it increased

their motivation to put forth their best effort. The terminology of best effort was utilized purposefully. Sally noted that effort did not always mean the student would master the concept and score proficient, but it often increased the amount of effort a student exerted.

Jessica noted that in her smaller classes, she had seen real change, especially utilizing circles. Her students went from situations where bullying was taking place, and students had formed cliques to the class, becoming a community. Jessica said it was a process, but students were now able to discuss concerns and issues in a Socratic setting to resolve conflicts. She emphasized that the smaller classes experienced results that she was not able to see in classes that were larger.

“The circles have worked out great for my homeroom. I can see positive changes and even when the students have problems, they are able to work things peacefully. It’s like they are a little family.” - Jessica

Michael said that it was crucial to build rapport with students. Many of the students that attended the school did not have emotional support and security in their home or neighborhood environment. Michael said that as teachers, it was a must to equip students in a haven where they feel someone believed in them and would push them to try to do something better in their lives. Meeting student's social and emotional needs would make a significant impact on the students and for the teacher as well. Michael closed with a cautionary statement saying while it was essential to have fun, build relationships and equip them to be successful, teacher and student relationships still must stay balanced so that education remained the primary function of the classroom.

Rob had the only dissenting voice of disagreement. His reply was no, and he did not think teacher and student relationships impacted academics or behavior. Most of his

kids were newcomers, which made it difficult to communicate between all parties. Many of the discussion activities (like circles) did not feel organic but more like forced compliance. He did not feel it is impacting grades or behavior. He tried to build relationships, but some kids did not need a relationship and just came to school to learn. The students that needed a relationship would often seek that out, and relationships are formed naturally not as a result of questioned mandated during a specified time. Those who did not want or need a relationship should not be forced into trying to create a relationship.

Additional comments

To close the interviews, the principal researcher asked each teacher to share any additional information they deemed pertinent. Sally shared that Teachers should be empowered to do what is best for their students and their classes because students and classes were all different. Circles may have worked in some situations but not in others. Some classes were too large, and some genders may have needed different modes of communication. Her last piece of wisdom that she shared was that teachers need to be seen as human beings who also needed emotional support. The more teachers are supported, the better they can support students.

Jessica ended with SEL was a more human response to kids' behaviors. Many teachers reacted to negative behaviors by wanting consequences for students that would alter student's behavior. SEL strategies and counseling looked at the root of why the child behaved in the manner they did, what triggered the behavior, and how to remove the trigger or helped students to cope in a more effective way.

Michael concluded by saying he believed the SEL strategies were making a positive change. Even though he had not seen the direct impact of restorative circles, it was early in the school year. He was sure that eventually, some students would begin to express themselves more because, at this point, not all students were participating. Michael believed it was a good idea to give students the opportunity to express themselves. While some students chose not to share, even those who were not speaking were able to hear that other people were experiencing some of the same things that they were going through.

Rob said at the beginning of the year, he dove into the strategies 100% but had lost faith in SEL strategies because he had not seen direct results from the strategies that he had been asked to use.

At the beginning of the year I was hopeful and dove into 100% but at this point I have lost faith, don't feel supported and have gone back to doing what I do. -Rob

Analysis

For our Nation to advance a create a platform where everyone will have an opportunity for success, we must create opportunities for all students to be academically adept. Whenever students are not prepared academically, they will be underprepared to be competitive in a global market to excel economically. A nation's utilization of its human potential is one of the determining factors in its prosperity (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010). When we do not ensure that all students are successful as a nation, we are crippling and limiting the ability of those students that we did prepare to maximize their level of success. A study by McKinsey and Company, a management

consulting firm, showed if there had been a reduction in the academic achievement gap between African American and Latino students and their white peers, the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) would have been between \$310 billion and \$525 billion higher in 2008 (McKinsey & Company, 2009). A study commissioned by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found relatively small improvement in students' academic performance can have significant impacts on the country's economy (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010).

The review of the literature identified multiple predictors that can serve as a basis for identifying if a student is at risk of falling behind their counterparts academically. In the past, many indicators focused on high absenteeism, low academic achievement, grade retention, and behavior problems. More recently, home environment, local environment (neighborhood), and violence that surround or impact students are also being identified as significant contributors. The achievement patterns of students in high minority and low-income areas are not consistently performing at similar levels to their counterparts. This difference in academic readiness is an indicator that students will drop out of school without attaining a high school diploma (Rumberger, R.W. 2011).

A student's decision to drop out of school is often complex and comprised of multiple domains to include, but not limited to, financial, individual, family, and social issues (Porce et al.) In 1992, Felitti and Anda developed the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) study that focused on categories of childhood maltreatment, neglect, and dysfunctional family environment. Brunzell et al. (2015) state that damage to an individual from the consequences of trauma inflicted on a child during the adolescent years can negatively impact students hindering their academic success and having long-

lasting adverse outcomes during adulthood. These experiences can cause students who are exposed to multiple ACES to be overloaded with stress hormones, which leaves them in a constant state of survival (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 14), which prevents them from focusing on academics.

For schools to have successful academic programs and meet the needs of students, they must also meet the social needs of students. In many cases, it is not a lack of intellect that has created an academic achievement that causes the student to drop out but a lack of social and emotional support that contributes to students dropping out of school. When students drop out of school, this has a higher potential of affecting the current sustainability of a nation to advance. By addressing the social needs of student's schools can work to increase academic achievement and increase the performance of students during school or extended school hours to increase the probability of academic success.

Two ways to meet the needs of students are counselors and instituting social and emotional learning practices in schools. In today's 21st Century Schools, counselors can help teachers address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The emotional support side of the counseling role should help students overcome adverse childhood experiences that create trauma so that students can mitigate and overcome social and emotional events, thereby equipping students with the tools to successfully integrate and contribute to society. In addition to ensuring that each child is given the opportunity to achieve academic success, delivering culturally responsive practices places school counselors in a unique position of creating an equitable school climate (Pica-Smith & Poynton, 2014). By working with the entire school community, school

counselors can provide services that are culturally sensitive to meet the academic, social/emotional, and career needs of all students.

Researchers have demonstrated that SEL plays an essential role in influencing nonacademic outcomes, but also has a critical role in improving children's academic performance and lifelong learning (Zins et al., 2004). SEL strategies are essential for low SES students for areas outside of academics. The adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and other obstructions that can accompany growing up in a lower SES area may impede the quality of instruction and level of academic achievement of low SES students. Proactive steps should be taken via effective and evidence-based interventions to help improve graduation rates and academic achievement levels in low SES schools. Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a foundation for safe and positive learning and enhances students' ability to succeed in school, careers, and life.

Social and emotional learning promotes healthy student development and reduces problem behaviors among students, which results in improved classroom climate and overall academic improvement (McCormick et al., 2015). Regardless of the data that supports the implementation of measures that will improve academic achievement and promote student social and emotional success is the human element, the staff, and others will be responsible for determining the success. In this regard, the alignment of teacher perceptions with prior research findings is an indication of broader implications on teachers' ability to identify and implement interventions and support of any program. The perception of the staff will promote buy-in and determine the genuine fidelity of the implementation of any program.

The academic achievement rating of the school where these strategies were implemented did increase looking at data from the same cohort of students as they advanced from 6th through 8th grade according to data that was recorded by the Texas Education Agency — based upon the key findings that emerged from the interviews regarding the implementation of SEL strategies the perceptions of teachers aligned with the schools scores increasing. The implementation of the strategies could have been better implemented with proper training based upon the results of the first key finding. The teachers did not feel that they were given thorough training on how to properly implement social and emotional learning strategies.

With the onset of any new program, the proper training is critical. Many of the teachers initially expressed a feeling of inadequacy due to a lack of training. When teachers see the benefits of a program and have a desire to participate, they should be empowered to do so. The ability to assist students would have been faster with appropriate training at the inception. Any schoolwide implementation should be planned for with the assistance of critical members within that school community.

The second finding was that teachers agreed that supporting the social and emotional development of students was important and should be consistently implemented schoolwide to achieve the maximum benefits. While it may not be a realistic expectation to have 100% of the staff fully engaged in the implementation of any program, a reasonable degree of consistency, support, and evaluation should be given. Measures should be established that would help to create a culture inclusive of the new policies. All staff members should be allowed to participate in how these new measures and procedures could be enacted and exhibited. Once those norms are collectively agreed

upon and decided, support should be given to ensure proper implementation, followed by feedback and evaluation of members within the organization to hold individual people accountable. When a situation begins to occur where only a small percentage of stakeholders are participating, the maximum benefits will not be attained.

The teachers perceived that having good relationships with their students had a positive impact on academic performance, although to what degree varied. At a minimal level, it is easier to receive from individuals where a level of respect is existing. The higher the level of respect, the greater the degree of trust can exist. Some teachers perceived that not every student would have a relationship with the teacher, whether it be positive or negative; however, students who are self-motivated will perform regardless of the relationship with the teacher. Some students may have a good relationship with a teacher but may not perform as well as the self-motivated students due to academic deficits or other reasons that impede a student from mastering objectives. The overall perspective is that teachers believe that when a good relationship, existing students will make a more significant attempt to perform well based upon the relationship that has been established.

The fourth finding went against the data that was supported in the literature review that access to counseling services positively impacted academic achievement. Most of the participants did not see a correlation to counseling services making a positive impact on counseling services. Most of the participants stated that students seemed more emotionally stable, but they attributed this primarily to SEL strategies that were being implemented. Several teachers also commented that they were unsure of which students were receiving counseling, but among those teachers, they still did not support losing

academic time for students to receive counseling services. The students that teachers did know were receiving counseling services teachers reported that academic did not increase for those students that were receiving services.

The fifth finding was that only half of the teachers involved contributed to a direct connection of student academic success with the social and emotional learning strategies that were utilized. The primary strategy that was being used was restorative circles to create dialogue and increase relationships among the community stakeholders. So, while participants agree that relationship building is the key to success, the specific use of restorative circles was deemed to be ineffective overall. Relationship building was viewed positively by participants, but the use of circles to build relationships was not. Teacher perception was that relationships were attempted to being forced to use circles. Some of the topics that were slated to be discussed were beyond the level of relationship for some topics. The general perception was that avenues should be created, but most relationships are formed naturally by genuine conversations and mutually shared activities.

Chapter summary

This chapter was the detailed information of the process that was used to interview the participants of the study. The chapter also contained the questions asked during the interview process, the number of teachers that supported or disagreed with each question, and a summary of the answers provided.

Chapter V

Discussion, Analysis, Recommendations, and Limitations

This study aimed to explore the perception of teachers of the impact of increased social and emotional learning support services in the form of peer group counseling utilizing restorative circles and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance. The researcher utilized a descriptive case study with four participants to conduct this research. Eleven research questions were utilized. The first was designed to obtain background information on each participant, and the last question was designed to solicit additional information the participant wanted to share regarding restorative practices or social and emotional learning. Questions 2 through 9 were designed to solicit the perceptions of restorative practices, social and emotional learning, and student access to counseling services and the perceived impact on student academic performance. The researcher gained the perspectives of the participants through one-on-one interviews, a clarification interview used as a member check, and a focus group interview with participants who work in a middle school within a large urban district.

Five key findings emerged from a thematic analysis of the interviews and focus group responses:

1. The teachers did not feel that they were given thorough training on how to properly implement social and emotional strategies.
2. The teachers agreed that supporting the social and emotional development of students was important and should be consistently implemented schoolwide to achieve the maximum benefits.

3. The teachers perceived that having good relationships with their students had a positive impact on academic performance, although to what degree varied.
4. The teachers did not have a strong perception that access to counseling services contributed to increasing academic achievement for students.
5. Only half of the teachers involved contributed to a direct connection of student success with the SEL strategies that were utilized.

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret and analyze the key findings as well as provide implications for practice and theory, generate recommendations for action and future research, reflection for potential bias and generate valid conclusions from the findings.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications both for theory and practice. 60% of the children entering our educational system have been exposed to violence over the past year (Finkelhor, Turner, et al., 2015). Violence is just one of many contributors to students' lack of focus on learning when they arrive at school. Many teachers are facing challenges as they work to help student's close academic achievement gaps, help students to overcome social and emotional challenges that may cause a range of challenging behavior. Social-emotional competencies are needed to skills are critical to helping students on their paths to being college and career ready. When students develop social-emotional competencies, they are more capable of seeking help when needed, managing their own emotions, and problem-solving difficult situations (Yoder, 2014).

While there is much research to support the implementation of varying strategies, terms like SEL and restorative practices can quickly become buzz words that are used, but not correctly implemented. Teachers need to have a base understanding of what they mean, how they should be implemented, and how they can contribute to academic success. For programs to maximize their effectiveness, multiple parties must agree and have proper training on how to achieve the desired goals. When training is not adequate, it will retard or negate the success of the participants involved. In extreme cases, participants may give up or opt-out of participating due to frustration in the process as a result of not being adequately equipped. Since people are more likely to support what they agree with, a greater understanding of programs should be established before or as part of the implementation of a program. When programs or strategies are being implemented, consistency and support are crucial to success. Ongoing or continued professional development is also needed for continued growth and support.

Implications for Educators

Social, emotional, and academic challenges transcend regional barriers and affect educators everywhere. The need to support students' social-emotional competencies are increasing. When students develop social-emotional competencies, they are more capable of seeking help when needed, managing their own emotions, and problem-solving difficult situations (Yoder, 2014). As systems of education desire to implement changes that will impact schools, research-supported strategies with documented results like SEL and RP must be more than rhetoric that is spoken of and not implemented. If teachers are not adequately trained and given the tools and support for implementation, the teachers will not be as effective.

Teachers must be allowed to take ownership of any changes. Educational environments, students, and social norms vary. Teachers must have the opportunity to adapt to how change is implemented in their classrooms to make it practical for their populations. As Jessica mentioned, with the implementation of circles, she noticed that her class grew into a community. Mike did not see the same results based upon the number of students in his class and the language barriers that exist between some of the students. A different approach could have been useful, but Mike was not given that option. Commitment and consistency are fundamental. As students experience consistency, they will become more receptive. Teachers should also be allowed to implement layered changes strategically. Unless a system is toxic multiple abrupt or rushed, changes could be counterproductive.

For educators, they must have a solid understanding of the changes that are being implanted. For the school where the research was conducted, educators needed an understanding of both SEL, as well as restorative practices before trying to implement either in their classroom so they could feel competent. Ongoing professional development should be implemented along with individual support where needed.

Implications for Administrators or Educational Leaders

From the perspective of the principal researcher, many administrators spend a large portion of their time dedicated to disciplinary actions or resolving conflict. The implementation of implementing SEL and RP has the potential to reduce conflict and support increased social diffusion and responsibility. The implementation of SEL and RP strategies have the potential to mitigate challenging behavioral issues, such as

classroom disruptions, acts of defiance, bullying, truancy, fighting, and harassment. Not only does this type of behavior take time away from the time and processes given to education it affects the academic standing of students by decreased engaged academic time and the physical loss of being in a classroom environment as a results of disciplinary actions that are often punitive, such as in-school suspension or out of school suspension.

This type of punishment that removes challenging students from the instructional setting began in the 1960s and has continued to be a typical response to misbehavior ever since, as it gives teachers and parents a sense of security if a student perceived as a threat is not in the classroom (Allman & Slate, 2011). This type of punitive action impacts minority students to a higher degree. Administrators and educational leaders who commit to creating a culture that embraces the teaching of SEL and uses restorative practices as a means of responding to behavior can reverse the harmful effects of dealing with student discipline. The principal's role in changing the way that schools approach the teaching of SEL and implementing restorative practices is essential in its success. They must invest in the time and money to ensure that all teachers are appropriately trained, and the professional development on the topic is ongoing.

Implications for District/State Policymakers

In 2011, the first state to formally adopt SEL standards was Illinois, and since then, there are only a total of eight states with SEL standards. If SEL strategies were implemented on a large scale, students would be better equipped to become productive members of society and potentially reduce the rate of incarceration and increase the financial ability of regions to financially support a more humane agenda that would

benefit society at large. Standards influence the development of curriculum and selection, professional development, and assessment standards by which young children and teachers are evaluated (CASEL, 2018). They essentially define goals and benchmarks for social and emotional education that could be measured.

When learning standards include social and emotional domains or competencies, state officials are communicating to administrators, teachers, parents, and students that these competencies are valued and of equal importance to academic competencies. If state standards were revised and departments of education focused on creating and implementing standards for SEL, the potential to close the opportunity gap in this country would be expedited and produce students that are prepared academically, socially, and emotionally to become contributing members of society.

Recommendations for Future Study

Involve stakeholders from the onset and have numerous focus groups and member checks to assess the progress and make recommendations for change to meet the needs of the students better and maximize results.

It is essential to state that in order to successfully implement any strategy or program, schools should consider multiple factors, such as perceptions of stakeholders, staffing, timing, funding that may be required as well as settings that may be needed for successful implementation. Some programs should be intermittently implemented for several reasons, which may include funding, climate, social and emotional needs of students, training, and other necessities. A realistic process implementation would assist in measuring the needs and tracking the progress.

This study gained perceptions of RP, SEL strategies, and access to counseling services at a specific school. Upon extensive research into RP, SEL, and counseling, the school where the research was conducted may have been better served by a widespread, systematic implementation. Schools should perform a similar study based upon a need's assessment of that school. Performing a needs assessment will allow the school to identify and implement social and emotional supports and interventions that they deem useful in their school for their population of students based upon the needs of that area. The examination of strategies should be examined individually to gauge the results. For example, have stakeholders determine several strategies that they feel could be utilized in their environment based upon their personality instead of being given a directive as to a specific strategy to be used.

A longitudinal study that utilizes repeated cycles of data collection to explore how teacher perceptions of the process, implementation, and support throughout the process related to social and emotional learning supports and interventions would better help districts and administrators learn how to maximize implementation of programs. Additionally, this type of study could be conducted with a larger sample size to gain a broader perspective from more participants.

Considerations for additional research

The study was conducted at a single location. While it believed that the results would be similar on campuses of varying sizes and locations, this may not be accurate. The pool of participants was limited based upon the limited number of teachers who were at the school through the implementation of the strategies. Another potential limitation

was that due to privacy laws, all the students that were receiving counseling were not known to the participants nor how long they may have been receiving services.

Therefore, if a student had received long term care, the student may have gained significant academic growth before the 8th-grade year when the student encountered the teacher. Another limitation was a change in administration during the process of implementation. While the focus remained on restorative practices and SEL strategies, a change of administration still occurred, which caused an adjustment to the new administration and how policies were implemented and enforced.

Conclusion

As a nation, we are at a crossroads of celebrating the legacy of our past or planning for the success of our future. We will advance to the degree and level based upon the proficiency of our collective body of citizenry. Educators, specifically teachers, are the spine that supports change. The perceptions of teachers toward a program will determine the effectiveness of that program. This case study was designed to determine the perception of teachers of the impact of increased social and emotional learning support services in the form of peer group counseling utilizing restorative circles and access to counseling services and its impact on student academic performance.

While the study only looked at one school in a district in a large urban area in the Southern region of the United States, the demographics and socioeconomic status of this school parallels schools across the entire United States. While the school has had a focus on SEL and

restorative practices for some time, the current administration has worked to create a culture at the school that encompasses every teacher and staff member in the movement to implement SEL and the use of restorative practices regularly in every classroom.

From this study, the researcher found that the utilization of SEL strategies, as well as the implementation of restorative practices, has had a positive impact in this school. Teachers perceive that students are happier and more focused at school. Several teachers have observed that students act as if they are part of a classroom community and as such, report that acts of bullying have decreased, and students communicate to resolve conflict. Some teachers also add that they have noticed a change in the relationships they develop with students through the implementation of SEL strategies that have created empathy through relationship-building strategies, such as restorative circles and restorative conversations, to resolve conflicts and problems in their classroom.

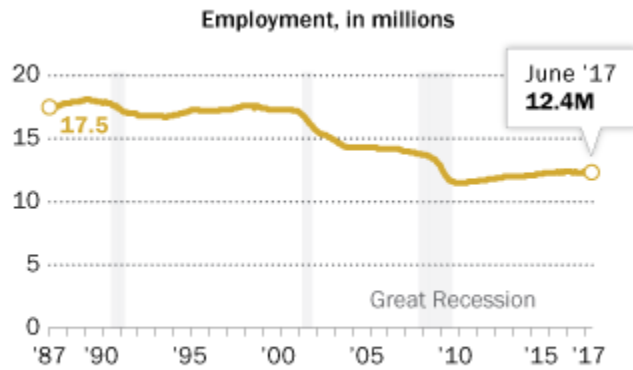
Teachers state that their students can regulate their emotions and, ultimately, their behaviors, which decreases the negative result of the conflict in the classroom, creating stronger relationships between teachers and students and students to students. Some Teachers also stated that through this process, students see teachers as people which they believe students can then transfer those human characteristics to other adults as well.

Many schools, particularly in large urban areas, have an increasingly diverse population, and research supports that culturally sensitive school counselors can support students as they mitigate the challenges they encounter. While the perceptions of the teachers interviewed in this study did not fully agree with this research, it is essential to

note that they also said that they were not aware of the students that were receiving counseling services.

Tables

Table 1 – United States Employment statistics from 1987-2017



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Table 2 – Typical entry-level education requirements

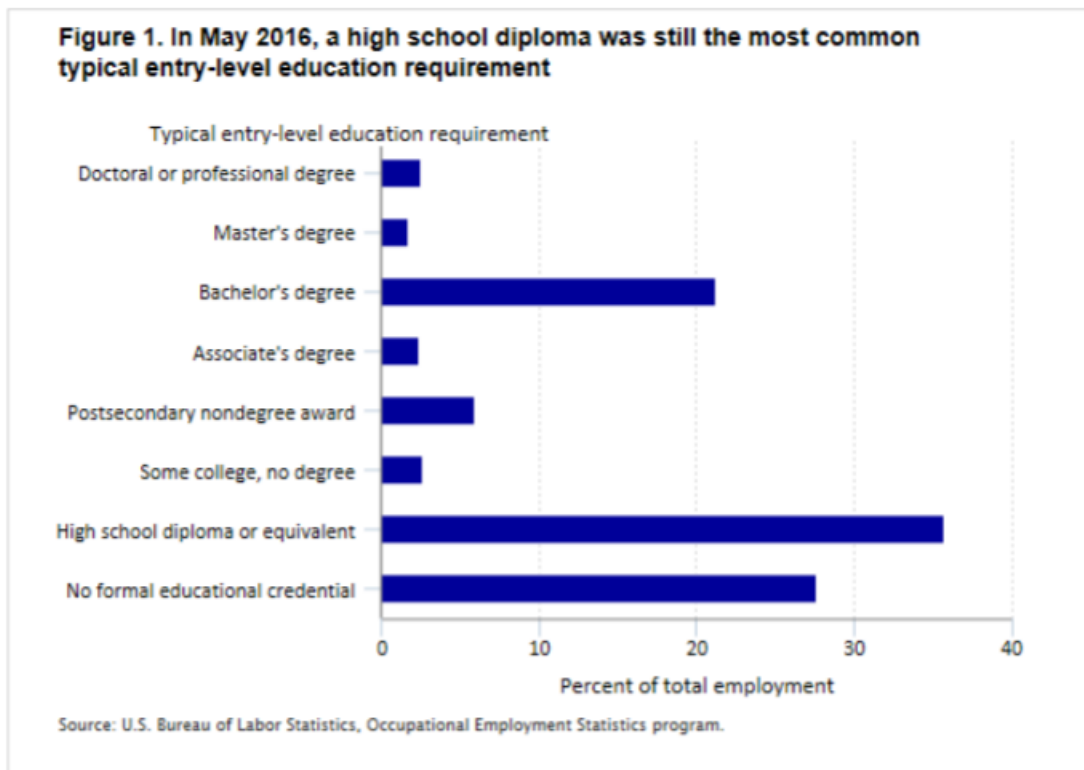


Table 3 – Seven Principles That Guide Restorative Justice Practices in Education
Seven Principles That Guide Restorative Justice Practices in Education

Principle	Explanation
1	Meeting student needs
2	Providing accountability and support for students
3	Making things right
4	Viewing conflict as a learning opportunity
5	Building healthy learning communities
6	Restoring relationships
7	Addressing power imbalances

Note. Adapted from “Restorative Justice in Education: What We Know So Far,” by K. Evans, J. Lester, & V. A. Anfara, Jr., 2013, *Middle School Journal*, 44(5), 57–63.

Table 4 – Five Key Elements That Support Effective Implementation of School Wide RP
Five Key Elements That Support Effective Implementation of School-Wide Restorative Practices

Key elements of implementation	Explanation
1. A full-time position of restorative coordinator (per school site)	This coordinator position's sole focus is supporting a positive, restorative approach to discipline at the school. This coordinator position oversees implementation of the other four key elements described in the table.
2. A school-wide strategic plan	The coordinator facilitates participation of all school stakeholders in dialogue and decision-making involving pre-existing behavior-related strategies (e.g., conflict resolution, peer mediation, peer mentoring) and moving them into a restorative framework and set of values. They also ensure that this new restorative framework is integrated into all parts of the school site.
3. Ongoing training for all stakeholders	All faculty and staff members and a select group of students and parent leaders should receive restorative practices training so they can become familiar with the restorative practices and train their peers.
4. Youth and parent leadership	A group of students and parent leaders who plan and assist with implementation of restorative practices at the school site, such as forming a student leadership council or engaging students and parents to be a part of trainings for school staff.
5. Systematic collection and monitoring of data	A common set of indicators specific to each school site should be developed, along with protocols for collecting data to guide and measure implementation and results of restorative practices.

Note. Adapted from “Building Safe, Supportive and Restorative School Communities in New York City: Case Study Series (Vol. 2),” by Dignity in Schools Organization, 2013 (https://www.nesri.org/sites/default/files/DSC-NY_CaseStudy_2013.pdf).

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Appendix A IRB protocol approval



DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

October 10, 2019

Michael Pelton
mpelton@uh.edu

Dear Michael Pelton:

On October 7, 2019, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Teachers' perceptions on the impact of social and emotional support services on academic performance.
Investigator:	Michael Pelton
IRB ID:	STUDY00001862
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M Pelton email invite pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Teacher interview questions 9_18.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.); • M. Pelton updated Protocol, Category: IRB Protocol; • M Pelton updated cover letter.pdf, Category: Consent Form;
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Non committee Review
IRB Coordinator:	Maria Martinez

The IRB approved the study on October 10, 2019; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.

As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

- Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects)

Appendix B Circles Protocol

Beginning Circle Time

Lesson Plan 1—Introduction to Circles

Purpose Circles have their own set of guidelines that are essential for them to function well. This lesson introduces those guidelines and begins the process by which students will become skillful participants in circles.

Objectives

- Understand reasons for being in circle.
- Know a functional definition of the shape of a classroom circle.
- Learn the four circle guidelines.
- Learn how to use a talking piece in the circle.

Circle Process and Preparation

Invite students to move quietly to the Circle

- You will need a talking piece. Examples include a small, soft toy; a special stick or stone; a rattle or gourd; or some other object that can withstand being passed around the class multiple times.
- Choose something to put in the center of the circle; a piece of decorative fabric placed on the floor or a low table, with flowers or other beautiful objects. You should also select objects that represent who you are what you value. It's an opportunity for students to get to know what you care deeply about. Finally, in weeks to come you will be adding classroom/student items to the circle. The talking piece can rest here until it is used.
- Prepare a poster of the "Circle Agreements" or write the agreements on the whiteboard or chart paper. You could also display them on a PPT slide and display throughout Circle Time. These agreements are your norms and guidelines for circle time. What do you expect from your scholars during this time...?

Introduction 5 minutes

Before you begin your circle, give a clear, simple and honest explanation, using your own words, about why the class will be meeting in circles. If you are completely transparent about the purpose and goals the students will be more likely to trust the circle. Explain "We will be meeting in circles to learn ways to better communicate and solve problems we may have with each other. We'll be talking about restorative justice, which is a way to make things right between people after someone has done something hurtful." "The shape of the circle is important. Even if we cannot sit in a perfectly round arrangement, we consider it a circle when everyone is able to see everyone else's face without having to lean forward.

Explain the Circle and the Circle Components (after the circle has formed) 3-5 minutes

Explain "Besides the shape of the circle, we put something in the center. As we do more circles together, we'll decide as a class what we should put in the center to symbolize what we want our community to be." Set up Center After students are seated, place something in the center of the circle: a colorful piece of cloth can be placed on the floor or a low table and decorated with flowers or a small bowl containing water or stones. You should also include artifacts that "tell your story" or provide an opportunity for

students to know and learn more about you. Suggestions include pictures, books, awards you've received, etc. Do this in a mindful manner, with a touch of ceremony. Use this time to "tell your story". Announce that the circle has begun.

Introduction of Talking Piece 3 minutes

This activity teaches respect for the talking piece. It invites sharing from imagination. Everyone gets to practice silence, and they experience speaking toward the center of the circle.

Explain

In our circles we will frequently use a talking piece. (Show them the talking piece they will be using in the next activity). Only the person who is holding the talking piece may speak. The person who is holding the talking piece has a responsibility to maintain the integrity of the circle by speaking from the heart. It is sometimes important to be silent when holding the talking piece; this can help us to listen to our hearts and discover what is true for us. When we speak, we speak into the center of the circle, adding our voice and our wisdom to the voices and wisdom of everyone else. Pass the talking piece respectfully from one person to the next.

Activity 5 minutes

Let's practice passing the talking piece around the circle silently and respectfully.

Demonstrate passing the talking piece by passing it first with the person sitting next to you and having them pass it back.

Next, pass it around in silence. As each person receives it, ask them to hold and look at it until they notice something about it...something they see in it, or something that it reminds them of.

Circle Values 2 minutes

Ask students to think about one word that describes what they will need for the Circle Time to be successful. Examples could be- honesty, confidentiality, no judgment, etc. For younger students the answers can consist of several words or even a picture. The teacher should provide a model. For example, "for this Circle to feel safe, I need from everyone- honesty. Have it written on an index card and place it around the Circle Centerpiece.

Have students to place their values in the center of the circle (index cards). Common types of values cover things like treating what is said as confidential (not gossiping about what is shared in circle), agreeing not to tease each other later when something serious has been shared, and so on." These could have been shared and discussed prior to coming to Circle.

Circle Opening for secondary level

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy.

"It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?” The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.

Say: Now we will move into a set of questions that will help us to get to know more about each other. My expectation is that we will all participate and share as a way of building classroom community.

Round 1 Question

What’s one thing you enjoyed doing this summer? *Remember to give your answer first and then pass the talking piece*

OR for younger students, PK-2

What did you do on your summer break?

Round 2 Question

A new school year often provides us with a fresh start. What’s one thing you are excited about as we return to this new school year?

Round 3 Question

Tell us about something you fear.

Thank everyone for their participation in the round of questions--

Circle Closing

Today I will end our Circle Time with a quote by Muhammad Ali a famous boxer and leader for change. He once said about himself:

“I am the greatest, I said that even before I knew I was”

Circle Debrief

1. After you have completed circle time, take a short poll by saying—

“Thumbs up if you enjoyed participating in circle time and thumbs down if you did not. “

2. Call on a few students or go around and ask students individually what they enjoyed most about circle time
3. Discuss any issues you saw—talking during the Circle, not taking Circle Time seriously, etc. Return to the Agreements to do a self/group check

Appendix C Interview Questions

1. Describe your career as an educator (years of service, population served, grade level served, subjects taught, successes that you feel you have had or proud moments/breakthroughs).
2. What are your perceptions of Restorative practices and Social Emotional Learning?
3. Describe the training you have had on Restorative Practices/SEL throughout your career?
4. What impact on the classroom environment and student academic performance have you observed from students having access to counselors to discuss personal issues?
5. What, in your perspective, is more effective – Restorative practices/SEL or zero tolerance-based discipline policies?
6. How do you think that the restorative practices and SEL strategies are impacting academic achievement and behavioral performance of your students?
7. Has your use of restorative practices (SEL or circles) in your classroom impacted your relationship with students? How?
8. How important do you think the relationships teachers have with their students impacts academic achievement?
9. Has your implementation of social and emotional learning impacted the academic performance of students? In what way(s)?
10. Thinking in terms of the entire school and not just your classroom, what impact do you think restorative practices, social and emotional learning supports, and counseling interventions have had on the school and academic performance?
11. Please share anything additional about restorative practices or Social and emotional learning from your experience as an educator.